

COMMUNITY FORUM
ON EDUCATION
ILLINOIS PTA DISTRICT 28

SUMMARY REPORT

Sponsored By

Illinois PTA, Center on Education Policy, and Joyce Foundation

November 14, 1998

Italian American Civic Organization of Berwyn
Berwyn, Illinois

HOST

Mary Ann Daugherty
Illinois PTA District 28 Director
Franklin Park, IL

RECORDER

Carol McElvain
NCREL
Oak Brook, IL

This forum was organized under the auspices of the Illinois PTA and the Center on Education Policy. The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) provided staff support to record the proceedings.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On Saturday morning, November 14, 1998 the Illinois PTA and the Center on Education Policy (CEP) sponsored their fourth community forum on education. The participants in this forum were more satisfied with their public schools than the average population, but they also believed that problems exist in public schools which could be improved. The participants believed that the schools were doing a good job with the resources that they had, but that more needed to be done to address the needs of all children. A running theme in the discussion was that schools need to be seen more as community centers.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FORUM

Consensus about recommendations to help improve your local schools

Many believed that stronger community involvement was necessary to improve public schools. Class size was seen to be a major area where schools could improve, and increased input from parents, peers and students was seen as a way to ensure that teachers were being assessed more accurately. Other participants would like the school year to run year round and provide before school and after school care to better meet the needs of the students.

Results from the forum evaluation

The participants who responded were unanimous in their belief that forums like these were a good thing to do in communities across the nation and that they would recommend the forum to others. A strong majority believed that the forums left them better informed about the state of public schools and that they could lead to an improvement in the public schools.

OVERVIEW OF PROCEEDINGS

On Saturday morning, November 14, 1998 the Illinois PTA and the Center on Education Policy (CEP) sponsored their fourth community forum on education at the Italian-American Civic Organization of Berwyn in Berwyn, Illinois. Illinois District 28 was responsible for organizing the forum. The discussion began at approximately 9:00 and closed at approximately noon when lunch was served. Approximately 100 invitations were sent out to various community members. Additional invitations to individuals not listed were made to District #28 public high school students, home schoolers (5), clergy (5 schools), and clergy (no school). Other legislators (2), municipality representatives and media were invited but did not respond and were not in attendance. Along with the invitation, a ten question Gallup Poll on opinions about public education was sent to the invitees, and the participants were asked to return their questionnaire prior to the start of the forum.

Sixty-nine people attended the event, with at least fifty active participants, taking into account the PTA volunteers, Committee facilitators, and recorders. Of those in attendance, the following constituency groups were represented:

PTA/CEP/District Assistants or Committee	- 19 (23%)	School Boards	- 2 (3%)
Business	- 3 (4%)	Administrator - Private	- 1 (1.4%)
State Legislators	- 3 (4%)	Administrator - Public	- 4 (5.8%)
Police/Law Enforcement	- 3 (4%)	Students/Student Involvement	- 8 (11.6%)
Parents - Private	- 1 (1.4%)	Teachers - Private	- 1 (1.4%)
Parents - Public	- 10 (14.5%)	Teachers - Public	- 4 (5.8%)
Clergy	- 1 (1.4%)		
Civic Groups	- 1 (1.4%)		
Media	- 2 (3%)		
Municipal	- 2 (3%)		
Seniors	- 4 (5.8%)		

The forum was moderated by Jack Jennings, of the Center on Education Policy (CEP), volunteers from the Illinois PTA facilitated the discussion and District/Committee participants acted as recorders at each table. Those District or Committee participants who were not needed to be recorders participated in the discussion. The facility was set up in tables of seven to eight people. Care was taken by the District organizers to place a variety of the constituents at each table. Although not every group was equally represented, there was enough of a variety and the groups were facilitated so that all of the participants were given the opportunity to participate.

Mary Ann Daugherty, Illinois PTA District 28 Director, Anna Weselek, Illinois PTA President, and Jack Jennings welcomed the group and introduced the other Illinois PTA members who assisted in organizing the event and were serving as facilitators for the forum. He explained that although the PTA is an advocacy group for public education, in this setting they were not serving as advocates, but as recorders and facilitators for open discussion for people with different experiences and viewpoints to get together to exchange ideas about public education. He explained that people who were opting out of the public school system were invited to the forum (e.g., home schoolers, those in parochial education, etc.), but that it was always difficult to get people in the door to such events. He explained the forum format and that it was part of a series of ten being held around the State of Illinois, as well as part of a larger series of meetings around the country. The format was explained as a series of discussions on the questions of the purpose of public schools, how public schools are doing and what can be done to improve public education. Jennings said that during the forum they would also discuss the participants' results in the PDK/Gallup Poll survey as compared the nationwide results, as well as recent changes in Illinois law on education issues.

The Purpose of Public Schools

Each of the tables was charged to discuss the question, solicit ideas, and then reach a consensus on three or four major purposes of schools. The discussion was not forced and most tables generated many ideas. One purpose found consensus at every table: To prepare all students to be responsible members of a democratic society. A majority of the tables also agreed that another purpose is to provide a well-rounded education for everyone, recognizing, providing for and challenging the potential, as well as special needs of each child. Other shared conclusions were to encourage life-long learning, and educate students to access and evaluate knowledge through creative problem solving and critical thinking in preparation for work in the global economy. Perhaps echoing this goal, a strong foundation in the "3 R's" and social needs were also mentioned.

Reflecting some of the cultural diversity among the forum's participants, there was also agreement among at least two of the tables that one of the purposes of public education was to preserve cultural heritage and develop tolerance of all cultures. This was highlighted by comments that public education should be accessible by all of the people regardless of money or background. Several forum participants stressed that it was important for public schools to "recognize the potential of every child." Several tables used this point as a jumping off point to criticize the emphasis on test scores. "Success in life is not measured by test scores," one participant noted. "They just don't measure the whole person."

Business representatives and older participants of the forum stressed preparedness for work, as well as strong citizenship and responsibility. One participant said, "It costs a lot more money to let children fall through the cracks than to educate them well." Older participants and many parents also highlighted the importance of including parents in the education process to become "partners" with teachers.

The Effectiveness of Public Schools

Many of the participants were wary of making generalities, but the major consensus was that some schools were doing a great job with their students and available resources. The effectiveness of the area's schools generated more discussion which opened the way for several tables to talk about the problems and challenges of public education. Several participants focused their criticism on the limited resources available to schools; however, a majority felt many schools were effective in managing their budgets wisely. There was a recognition that personnel and administration could do a lot to make a school "effective" regardless of the resources the school had. As one participant put it, "It's not the wealth, it's the know-how."

Many participants thought that some schools in their area were doing a good job of promoting diversity; others felt that their public schools were effective in promoting parental involvement and reaching out to the community. Again, however, generalities were difficult for the group. One parent felt that perhaps 25% of parents were actively involved in schools and could demand a good education for their children, and another 50% would “do okay” regardless of involvement. However, she was distressed by what she thought was 25% who did not have anyone advocating for them and were “lost” in the system by not having their needs addressed. Not meeting children’s needs on both ends of the spectrum was also an issue emphasized by other participants, with some tables expressing concern that many students were not being challenged by their schools.

Student participants in the forum were most vocal in their criticism of their schools’ effectiveness. One said that kids she knew in private schools were having breakfast meetings with their counselors, but that in her school, with three counselors for 700 students, it would be surprising if the counselor knew the kids’ names. Some of the students believed that a critical missing element in the process was evaluation from parents and students. One high school student said that “all the kids and even the parents can know that there are bad teachers you don’t want to get, but that unless the administration recognized a problem, they would stay ‘forever.’”

Several tables felt that some schools were effective in providing a stable environment for children, but this also served as a springboard for discussion of the problems that children face today, and about how much more schools could be doing to “provide a safe haven”. One legislator said that “students should know they’re coming to a place where it’s okay to be themselves.” Several participants noted that where schools opened their doors (on weekends, in evenings), many students would use the school as a “refuge.” Before- and after-school care was seen as a high priority by many participants.

The safety discussion led its way at one table to more criticism of the testing process and the need to teach study skills. As one police officer put it: “It depends on where you’re coming from. Maybe in a certain district, if their kids don’t end up to be crackheads, that’s a great [result] from where they’re coming from.” Discussion about testing led others to criticize schools for “teaching to the tests” and not “teaching how to learn.” One senior, a former teacher, felt that schools needed to incorporate a “study skills curriculum” to teach children how to learn more effectively.

PDK/Gallup Poll Results

Jennings followed up the discussion with the comparison of the group’s Gallup Poll survey results against the national results. The Berwyn group as a whole was more satisfied with public education by an almost 2:1 ratio than the national average. While nationally 10% of the respondents would grade the quality of public schools an “A”, and 36% would grade it a “B”, 18% of the Berwyn group would give their schools an “A” and 50% would give a “B”. He indicated that the reasons for the participants’ satisfaction could be the sampling of the people who were involved in public education, or that their schools were simply better. An equal number, 31%, between the national poll and the Berwyn participants graded the schools a “C”. Fourteen percent of the national respondents would give their schools a “D” or “F”, but only .02% of the local respondents would even give a “D” and none gave their schools a failing mark.

Somewhat reflective of the testing comments made in the small group discussions, 22% of the local respondents believed there was too much emphasis on testing, and fewer Berwyn respondents than the national average believed the emphasis was too low (18% for the local group and 28% for the national average). Sixty percent of the respondents felt there was about the right amount of testing.

Answers to the other questions mirrored the group’s more positive attitude about their public schools than the national poll respondents. Thirty-five percent of the local group versus 51% of the national group were in favor of a voucher system. More felt their community’s school curriculum was meeting today’s needs (52% local against 39% national) and that extracurricular activities were very important to a young person’s education (75% local versus 63% national).

More local respondents (62% local against 41% national) felt that students today were receiving a better education than they received. The local respondents were much more satisfied with the size of their schools than the national response, with 73% of the Berwyn respondents indicating that the schools were “about the right size” in comparison to 49% in the national poll. Seventy-nine percent of the local respondents compared to 62% of the national respondents believed that community schools were taking the necessary steps to promote understanding and tolerance of racial and ethnic backgrounds.

When asked to reflect on a list of social problems being faced by schools today, fewer local participants believed that the problems were “very” serious, but more did judge the problems to be “fairly” serious than the national respondents. On the issues of drugs, discipline and smoking, only 22% of the local respondents believed the problems were “very” serious, as compared to 50% of the national respondents. The “fairly” serious national respondents dropped to approximately 25%, but the local respondents raised to 40-50% on the survey. Teen pregnancy, fighting and gangs were also seen as “fairly” serious problems.

Finally, the Berwyn respondents felt fairly satisfied with their voice on most areas of school administration with responses ranging from 45%-47% indicating that their say was “about right” on the issues of allocation of school funds, selection/hiring of administrators and principals, and curriculum/subjects offered. Sixty percent of the respondents felt they had the right amount of say on teacher and administrator salaries, and 31% felt their say was “about right” on the issue of selection of books and instructional materials. This compares to approximately 30% “about right” across the board on the national responses, with 50% or greater of the national respondents indicating that would like “more” say on these issues.

Recommendations for improving public schools

Jennings then introduced the final discussion question by summarizing a handout the participants received on recent education legislation passed by the Illinois legislature. The legislation, which dealt with a variety of issues, including raising the minimum per pupil spending average to diminish the disparity between the wealthier and poorer property tax districts, graduation requirements, and teacher tenure and accreditation, was suggested as a jumping off point for the tables to come up with changes that could make schools more effective. The charge for the final task was to generate discussion, then come to a consensus on a no-cost change that could be made and a change that would cost money to make schools more effective.

The legislation discussion did indeed spark conversation, and moved several tables to criticize the disparities in per pupil spending and the current school funding system. Many of the participants were unhappy that there were such dramatic disparities (with a range from \$3,500 to as high as \$15,000 per pupil around the state), but had great difficulty expressing ideas that could alter the current structure. Participants also expressed dissatisfaction with the teacher review process, with many expressing a belief that it was “virtually impossible” to remove a bad teacher unless they did “something criminal.”

The discussions were wide ranging, nearly all of the tables had difficulty reaching a clear consensus on one or two solutions. Increasing parental and community involvement in the schools led the pack on the “no-cost” solution front. Participants felt that the community should become more involved in the schools, and that schools should be used more as “community centers” open year round and before and after school hours. The group thought the schools should also be reaching out to business and seniors for tutoring and/or mentoring. Participants thought that there should be more opportunities within the classroom for parental involvement. Increasing parenting skills and involvement in the classroom through workshops, forums and volunteering were also emphasized by many as a low or no cost improvements. Another leading “no-cost” solution was to improve teacher reviewing to include students, peers and parents, as well as administrators. Related to this, participants felt that teachers should be required to do more continuing education, possibly through peer training.

On the cost side of improvement, the clear majority wanted to reduce class size. Many felt that the schools did not reflect society today, and wanted to year-round schooling (this was vehemently opposed by the students). Again, reflecting the thought that school buildings could be utilized more as community centers, participants wanted schools to provide before school and after school programs. Another cost improvement was to improve the pool of teachers. When asked how this could be done, one participant said “Pay them!” but further discussion found that this issue was more complicated and was tied to a more “no cost” improvement of emphasizing the value of education and society’s perceptions of teachers. Particularly distressing to many in the group was the fact that primary school teachers were paid less than high school teachers. Improving school physical facilities was also a strong “cost” improvement.

Concluding Comments and Next Steps

Discussion was still going strong when Jennings summarized the group’s conclusions on the issues and asked for their input on where to go. The participants were strongly in favor of holding more forums, limited to schools in order to get more members of the community involved in the schools. The Berwyn group wanted to know “how you go from ideas to policies” and communication was highlighted as a strong force for change. Jennings said that getting community stakeholders involved in the process as a partnership was effective and could lead to greater awareness within the community of issues and the potential for improvement. The group was dismissed with the charge to “be proactive, not reactive” and change could happen.

Summary

The discussion of the major questions led to the following consensus:

- *What is the purpose of public school?*

To prepare all students to be responsible members of a democratic society; to provide well-rounded education for everyone, recognizing, providing for, and challenging the potential of each child, recognizing special needs as well. Included should be the fine arts and physical education; schools should also encourage life-long learning.

- *How effective is your local school?*

While some schools are doing a great job with their students with the resources they have, there is room for improvement. Some schools do a great job promoting diversity and spending their limited resources well, but there is a need for greater family and community involvement. All students need to be reached and challenged, according to their needs, and improved study skills need to be taught.

- *What recommendations do you have for improving your local school?*

Cost recommendations include reducing class size, year-round schooling and before school and after school care, improving physical facilities and paying teachers better. No-cost recommendations were to bring more of the community into the education process as volunteers, mentors and resources; increasing parental involvement and raising the value of education and teaching as a profession were also seen as important.

Forum Evaluation Summary

Due to the uncertain number of District/Committee volunteers (at least 17) who participated in the forum or the evaluation, it is unclear what percentage of the participants responded, but there were a total of 53 responses to the survey, which meant that nearly all of the participants responded. Some evaluations were not filled out completely or more than one answer was given. Respondents were generally extremely enthusiastic about the forum, with nearly grading the activities with a “1” or “2”; that is, “very useful” or “somewhat useful.” Eighty percent of the respondents felt the discussion at the tables was “very useful.” Seventy-seven percent found the organization of the forum “good.” The only areas which received less useful or poor responses were the Gallup Poll questions, which had 25% of the responding that they were not as useful, and the facilities, which 15% found adequate and 4% rated as poor.

A majority of the respondents (68%) did not believe that the forum resulted in a change of their attitude about public schools. Some commented that they felt they had a good attitude about their schools going into the forum. Of the 32% who did believe their attitude changed, 89% felt better about the schools, and 11% felt both better and worse.

Before the forum, 83% of the respondents thought schools were better than generally pictured (also reflecting the responses to the Gallup Poll), 11% thought they did a good job as they were, and 6% thought they were failing. At the close of the forum the failing grade did not change, but those who thought the schools were doing a good job as they were dropped to 6% and the “better, but with problems” category picked up to 88%.

The group was nearly unanimous in its support for the objectiveness of the information (98%) and effectiveness of the moderator (100%). All of the respondents believed that continuing the forums in other communities would be a good thing to do and would recommend the forum to others, and 91% felt that the forums could lead to an improvement in public schools.

Many participants added comments to their evaluation forms. Most of the comments praised the forum and emphasized the need for additional forums. Improvements for future forums were to increase the diversity of the participants and make sure that there is a healthy population of critics in attendance.

PDK/GALLUP POLL QUESTIONS

1. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves, in your community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools in your community?

	<u>National</u>	<u>Local</u>
A	10%	18%
B	36%	50%
C	31%	31%
D	9%	.02%
Fail	5%	
Don't Know	9%	

2. In your opinion, is there too much emphasis on achievement testing the public schools in this community, not enough emphasis on testing, or about the right amount?

	<u>National</u>	<u>Local</u>
Too Much	20%	22%
Not Enough	28%	18%
About the Right Amount	48%	60%
Don't Know	4%	

3. A proposal has been made that would allow parents to send their school-age children to any public, private, or church-related school they choose. For those parents choosing non-public schools, the government would pay part of the tuition. Would you favor or oppose this proposal in your state?

	<u>National</u>	<u>Local</u>
Favor	51%	35%
Oppose	45%	62%
Don't Know	4%	

4. Do you think the school curriculum in your community needs to be changed to meet today's needs, or do you think it already meets today's needs?

	<u>National</u>	<u>Local</u>
Needs to be changed	54%	47%
Already meets needs	39%	52%
Don't Know	7%	

5. I'd like your opinion about extracurricular activities, such as school band, sports, dramatics, and the school newspaper. How important are these to a young person's education – very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important?

	<u>National</u>	<u>Local</u>
Very important	63%	75%
Fairly important	27%	20%
Not at all important	8%	
No Difference/Don't Know	2%	

6. As you look on your own elementary and high school education, is it your impression today that children get a better, or worse, education than you did?

	<u>National</u>	<u>Local</u>
Better	41%	67%
Worse	48%	33%
No difference/Don't know	11%	

7. In your opinion, are the public schools in your community taking the necessary steps to promote understanding and tolerance among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds or not?

	<u>National</u>	<u>Local</u>
Yes	62%	79%
No	27%	18%
Don't Know	11%	

8. How serious a problem would you say each of the following is in public schools in your community? Would you say a very serious problem, fairly serious, not very serious, or not at all serious?

	<u>NATIONAL</u>				<u>LOCAL</u>			
	<u>VERY</u>	<u>FAIRLY</u>	<u>NOT VERY</u>	<u>NOT AT ALL</u>	<u>VERY</u>	<u>FAIRLY</u>	<u>NOT VERY</u>	<u>NOT AT ALL</u>
A. DRUGS	52%	28%	13%	3%	22%	40%	31%	.02%
B. DISCIPLINE	50%	26%	17%	3%	22%	40%	42%	2%
C. SMOKING	50%	26%	15%	3%	22%	51%	28%	.04%
D. ALCOHOL	44%	28%	18%	4%	17%	37%	28%	.04%
E. TEENAGE PREGNANCY	43%	28%	19%	4%	.08%	42%	35%	.02%
G. FIGHTING	37%	27%	26%	5%	13%	42%	35%	.02%
H. GANGS	37%	20%	28%	11%	20%	39%	35%	.06%

9. In your opinion, are the public schools in your community too big, too small, or about the right size in terms of the number of students.

	<u>National</u>	<u>Local</u>
Too Big	30%	13%
Too Small	15%	13%
About the Right Size	49%	73%
Don't Know	6%	

10. Do you feel that parents of public school children should have more say, or do they have about the right amount of say about the following areas of public schools?

	<u>NATIONAL</u>			<u>LOCAL</u>		
	<u>MORE</u>	<u>LESS</u>	<u>ABOUT RIGHT</u>	<u>MORE</u>	<u>LESS</u>	<u>ABOUT RIGHT</u>
A. ALLOCATION OF SCHOOL FUNDS	57%	8%	29%	39%	14%	45%
B. SELECTION & HIRING ADMINISTRATORS AND PRINCIPALS	55%	9%	30%	35%	14%	47%

C. CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS OFFERED	53%	10%	32%	37%	16%	47%
D. TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATOR SALARIES	48%	14%	32%	20%	14%	64%
E. SELECTION OF BOOKS AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS	46%	13%	37%	31%	20%	31%

(Responses do not total 100% because of those not answering all questions or answering “Don’t know.”)

FORUM EVALUATION RESULTS

	1 Very Useful	2	3	4	5 Not Useful
1. PDK/Gallup Poll Questions	19%	56%	15%	8%	2%
2. Activities that dealt with Purposes	38%	47%	15%		
3. Activities that dealt with Effectiveness	40%	45%	15%		
4. Activities that dealt with Changes Needed	47%	41%	11%		
5. Discussion at Tables	80%	20%			
6. Large Group Discussion	44%	42%	14%		
7. Overall evaluation of the Forum	59%	41%			
	1 Good	2	3	4	5 Poor
8. Organization of the Forum	77%	21%		2%	
9. Facilities	42%	38%	15%	2%	2%
10. Use of time	59%	32%	9%		

11. The information presented was:	Objective – 98%	Both Biased & Effective – 2%	
12. The moderator was:	Effective – 100%	Ineffective – 0	
13. Would you recommend this forum to others:	Yes – 100%	No – 0	
14. Has this forum resulted in a change of your attitude about public schools?	Yes – 32%	No – 68%	
If yes, which of the following best describes that change?			
	I feel better about the schools – 89%		
	I feel better & worse about the schools – 11%		
15. Has the forum left you better informed about the state of the public schools?	Yes – 71%	No – 29%	
16. Do you think that this kind of forum would be a good thing to do in communities across the nation?	Yes – 100%	No – 0	
17. Do you think that these kinds of forums could lead to an improvement in the public schools?	Yes – 91%	No – 4%	Don't Know – 5%
	A	B	C
	Good job as they are	Better than pictured, but still have problems	Failing and alternatives must be found
18. Which of the following best describes your position <u>before</u> the forum?	11%	83%	6%
19. Which of the following best describes your position <u>after</u> the forum?	6%	88%	6%
20. Suggestions for strengthening future forums?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the people here already are involved with schools so it is a natural inclination to be here and express an opinion: For example, NHS students, they've already got the parental/school support. Leyden has a good AP forum. What about the other students? Could they express what they need somehow? • These particular forums and these particular groups <u>could/should</u> continue to refine what was already said today. Meet again with the same group. Also, drop non-need points. Work around and with money. Provide cash incentives to attend meetings for parents in local areas (not forums). • School meetings; Penalties (take away programs for non-parent involvement. Move specialty training costs to business. They can afford it and will pay for it, especially in this tight market. • Allow time to discuss taking action on discussions; be sure to give report to each forum participant; invite parents <u>not</u> on PTA with a totally different outlook. Don't limit suggestions to allow for copious notes. • Business people were an excellent addition to the forum. • School board presidents and members present to listen to suggestions. • Continue from Step 1 (this forum); Step 2 to summarize and narrow down priorities; Step 3 - get political. • Continue this forum. 		

- Follow today's agenda.
- Include critics as well as proponents.
- These forums could be continued in school districts.
- Loved all the suggestions! Would like to know better what the standards are across the nation. I am familiar with my district's but not as familiar with the inconsistencies in schools. I am ashamed of the fact that there are so many.
- Include more broad-based community members. Encourage schools to have these forums and put it all together to come up with more broad-based analysis.
- The size of the room and close proximity of groups. Sometimes made it difficult to hear discussion at the tables.
- Time permitting - more specific programs and activities that have worked "out there!"
- Involvement of parents, students, community leaders, school administrators, grandparents.
- Schedule more frequently this type of events. Invite personalities and/or authorities who have a decisive role on the suggestions that come out of this forum.
- Including a teacher and administrator and board member in each group is very important. Our group did not have anyone "just a parent." The talk about higher salaries is a bandwagon discussion. What about sense of service. What about status of teachers. Professionals don't have unions. Isn't it interesting that the entire morning came to a discussion of teacher salaries.
- Forums like this should have positions sent to legislatures and encourage those legislators to follow through with suggested changes. Continue to have effective moderators/facilitators which kept the question/discussion moving and coming to consensus. Self-assessment is good.
- I think more parents who are not involved with PTAs are needed. Most parents here seemed to have a PTA view, me included. Just a more even balance.
- Have more types of people. I know I understand that home-school teachers and students were invited, but none attended that I know of. A few college students should be invited. If the tables were a bit more diverse, it might have helped, but we were already discussing things quite well. Encourage whoever sponsors/organizes these forums to have more at high schools - maybe one for every conference.
- An established follow-up set of activities.
- Forums should be held in individual school districts. This type of brainstorming and broad input would be extremely useful in taking action to help the effectiveness of the school. The casual, no microphone atmosphere made it easy to voice an opinion without fear.