Supporting Educator Voice through Whole School Evaluation

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Context

City Charter High School (City High) is a charter school located in downtown Pittsburgh that utilizes an innovative school model and practices, including a four-day school week and teacher looping, to prepare students for success in postsecondary education and employment. Since its founding in 2002, City High has collected, published, and learned from a wide range of success indicators with the support of its external evaluator, Dr. Catherine Nelson. The school's annual reports go far beyond required compliance reporting to measure the accomplishments of the school's mission using multiple lenses, including the student learning experience, academic outcomes, post-high school success, school climate, and the full inclusion of special education students in both academics and school culture. The evaluation strives to include voices and data points from all stakeholders (students, parents, faculty, and staff), wherever possible to include local, state, or national comparison data, and to be attentive to long term trends. In the 2023-2024 academic year, the Evaluation for Learning (EFL) team was brought on to build on the work of Dr. Nelson.

A key component of this transition was an "evaluation refresh" which the EFL team conducted to offer City High stakeholders the opportunity to reflect on the annual evaluation process and the questions it seeks to answer. Through this process, we identified new guiding questions for the evaluation and implemented new share outs, sensemaking opportunities, and reporting tools and structures.

Our work follows the Decision-Oriented Educational Research framework, which emphasizes providing continuous and relevant information to school decision-makers rather than isolated studies (Bickel & Cooley 1986). This framework supports City High's innovative model and helps school leaders and educators adjust and adapt interventions in response to data when it is most relevant.

Evaluation Refresh Goals

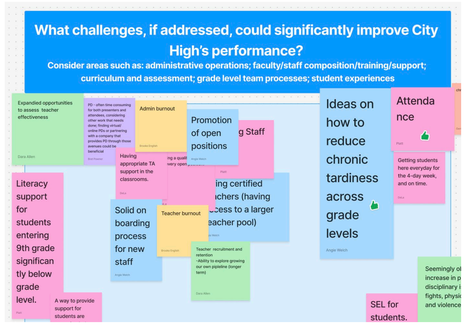
- Engage stakeholders in a co-design process to capture their voice and ensure the evaluation is addressing their most pressing questions
- Incorporate new sources of data and analyses
- Explore new sensemaking opportunities to support school educators and leaders in making key implementation decisions
- Implement new reporting tools and structures to amplify the reach and impact of the evaluation and its findings

Data

- Interviews and focus groups with school leadership, educators, board members, and students
- Document review of past evaluation reports
- Administrative data on student demographics (economic disadvantage status, race/ethnicity, gender), academics (Keystone/PVAAS scores, honors enrollment and grades, attendance), and student discipline records (suspensions, expulsions)

Methods and Analysis

Our primary data collection method for this refresh was a series of brainstorming focus groups with different stakeholder groups. In these, we asked participants to identify challenge areas that require greater understanding to address, areas of uncertainty where additional data are needed to improve decision-making, and existing areas of evaluation that should be continued or expanded.



We performed affinity clustering and thematic analysis of the data to identify common themes across stakeholders. The data from these sessions informed the development of new evaluation questions, new data collection activities, and new sensemaking opportunities.

What changed for City High and its evaluation?

We made several changes as a part of our evaluation refresh. We organize these changes into three areas: evaluation questions, data collection, and stakeholder engagement.

Evaluation Questions

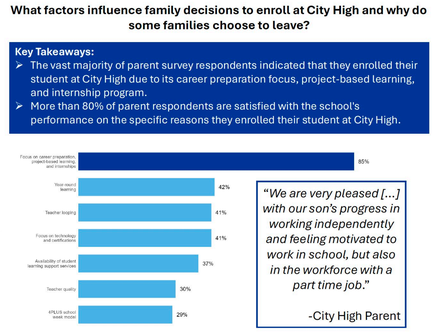
We developed an updated set of evaluation questions that more accurately reflect the current challenges that City High faces as a school. These questions incorporate questions from the brainstorming sessions and address a wide range of topics, including experience of City High's Core Values, faculty wellbeing and grade-level team cohesion, and the effectiveness of City High's preparation for academic success. It is important that these questions reflect the needs of City High and its stakeholders as our data collection activities and reporting are designed with these questions at the center.

Data Collection

We have collected data from the National Student Clearinghouse to investigate postsecondary outcomes for City High students and conducted focus groups with students to learn more about their experience of the four-day school week. We also refreshed the annual evaluation surveys, incorporating new items about student wellness and burnout and delving deeper into the definitions of City High's Core Values.

Stakeholder Engagement

As a part of our annual evaluation cycle, we produce a report that presents our evaluation findings and offers opportunities and recommendations for action. We prepare the City High evaluation report as a series of chart essays (see figure), a format that is shareable and elevates the most relevant data for those that are most affected by it and can most readily implement changes to affect it. We also hold several report debriefs with City High faculty, staff, and leadership. These debriefs offer an opportunity to reflect on this year's data and identify findings to celebrate, to reflect on, and to act on.



Enhancing Evaluation Use

The whole school evaluation of City High has bolstered avenues for educator learning and created opportunities for improvement at the school level.

City High Annual Reporting
2025-2026 Academic Year
2026 Graduating Cohort

July 2, 2026
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EVALUATION FOR LEARNING

- The changes we implemented have benefited the evaluation by incorporating stakeholder feedback into future cycles of data collection. By directly working with educators to reflect on the data and findings, their voice is incorporated into the evaluation as we learn more about what their needs are as practitioners, allowing us to refine our data collection methods and areas of inquiry.
- Anecdotal feedback from City High staff indicate that these practices allow them to engage with the data more deeply and in a way that answers their most pressing questions of practice.
- Through discussions at report debriefs, educators identified opportunities to engage students in school improvement efforts. City High's Student Forum will offer educators student perspective on the challenges they face, such as discipline, dress code, and student responsibility for learning.
- The chart essay format for the annual report offers City High a way to engage with parents and community members in the promotion of active use of data and findings.

Evaluation for Learning Group

The Evaluation for Learning (EFL) team provides rigorous evaluation and research to support the decision-making needs of local and national program leaders and practitioners in the education policy space. The EFL group has assisted City Charter High School with program development and improvement research to ensure the program is equitably meeting its key goals.