

Session 5: February 26th

1) What did we discuss? (Topic)

We revisited the criteria for a strong recommendation, emphasizing that it must address a **clear need** and be grounded in data and what we're learning from students, staff and families. Anchored in our goals for the SPS high school experience, the data and student voice point to three urgent priorities:

- **Consistent structures for academic supports and acceleration** to help students succeed in their coursework, get back on track when they're behind, and access learning at their skill level
- **Consistent structures** to support students with high school and beyond planning
- **Equitable access to opportunities for peer connection**, such as affinity groups, extracurricular activities, clubs, and volunteer opportunities

We reviewed the feedback on the options presented last session and continued to explore those that were most promising. We also went deep on a new option: 9th Grade Support, Extension, and Seminar, which would be a dedicated course built into the 9th grade schedule.

In breakout groups, the Taskforce went deep into:

- **Course Failure Prevention:** An online companion module for the specific course students are taking that allows them to live recover concepts and receive live group support.
- **Flex Blocks:** An additional block of time to be used flexibly to meet student needs throughout the week and school year – schools need to vote yes to implement this time.
- **9th Grade Support, Extension and Seminar Course:** A one period course built into the 9th grade schedule that is flexibly dedicated to a variety of purposes.

2) What did we learn about the potential impact and feasibility of these options?

As we dug deeper into specific options, we elevated the following:

- **Flex Block** could be implemented in SPS only with a school vote due to its impact on teacher prep time and student course loads. This is a promising strategy, and we will continue refining the concept and establishing clear parameters for what high-quality implementation requires.
- **Course failure prevention** shows strong potential, and we are clarifying key design questions, including which staff provide support and when this strategy would be implemented.

We reviewed national data underscoring 9th grade as a critical year for student success and engagement, then examined current supports already in place across SPS high schools. Building on this, we explored a 9th grade course building into the 6-period schedule, that would allow students to flexibly access targeted academic support and seminar experiences based on need. We also examined the impact on credit accumulation and the tradeoffs of adding a required 9th grade course.

3) What was the feedback from the group?

The group had the opportunity to deeply discuss several of the options proposed and explore more deeply the feasibility and implementation.

Feedback we heard from the discussion included:

- **Explore feasibility of a 7-period schedule:** Many Taskforce members elevated a desire to explore the feasibility of a 7-period schedule, acknowledging that it may be challenging for all schools to implement this option due to budget and contractual constraints.
- **Preserve student access to electives:** Members raised concerns that a required 9th grade course could limit elective access and create logistic scheduling challenges. While the proposed course was not broadly supported, educators emphasized the value of cohorting students to enable collaborative data analysis and more targeted instructional support.

- **Establish clear expectations and curriculum:** Consistent with prior sessions, members noted that the current advisory curriculum is not meeting student or staff needs and called for clearer guidance and stronger parameters to ensure that this type of time is used effectively.
- **Ground in priorities to navigate necessary tradeoffs:** The Taskforce acknowledged that due to the constraints, all options on the table would require tradeoffs, and emphasized the importance of clearly defining priorities to guide decision-making.

4) Improvements for Next Time

In response to this great discussion and feedback, going forward, we plan to:

- **Narrow and focus options:** As we move into the next phase, we will narrow down the options and more explicitly center budget, staffing feasibility, and tradeoffs.
- **Allow more time for collaboration and alignment:** The next session will be extended to two hours to enable deeper discussion. We will allow space to make more targeted connections with other subgroups to align on recommendations and incorporate their learning.

5) What recommendations were made (if any)?

- The group continued to examine options and assess feasibility and tradeoffs but did not make a final recommendation. Next session, we will transition to a new phase of the work where we narrow down options with the goal of aligning on an initial recommendation.