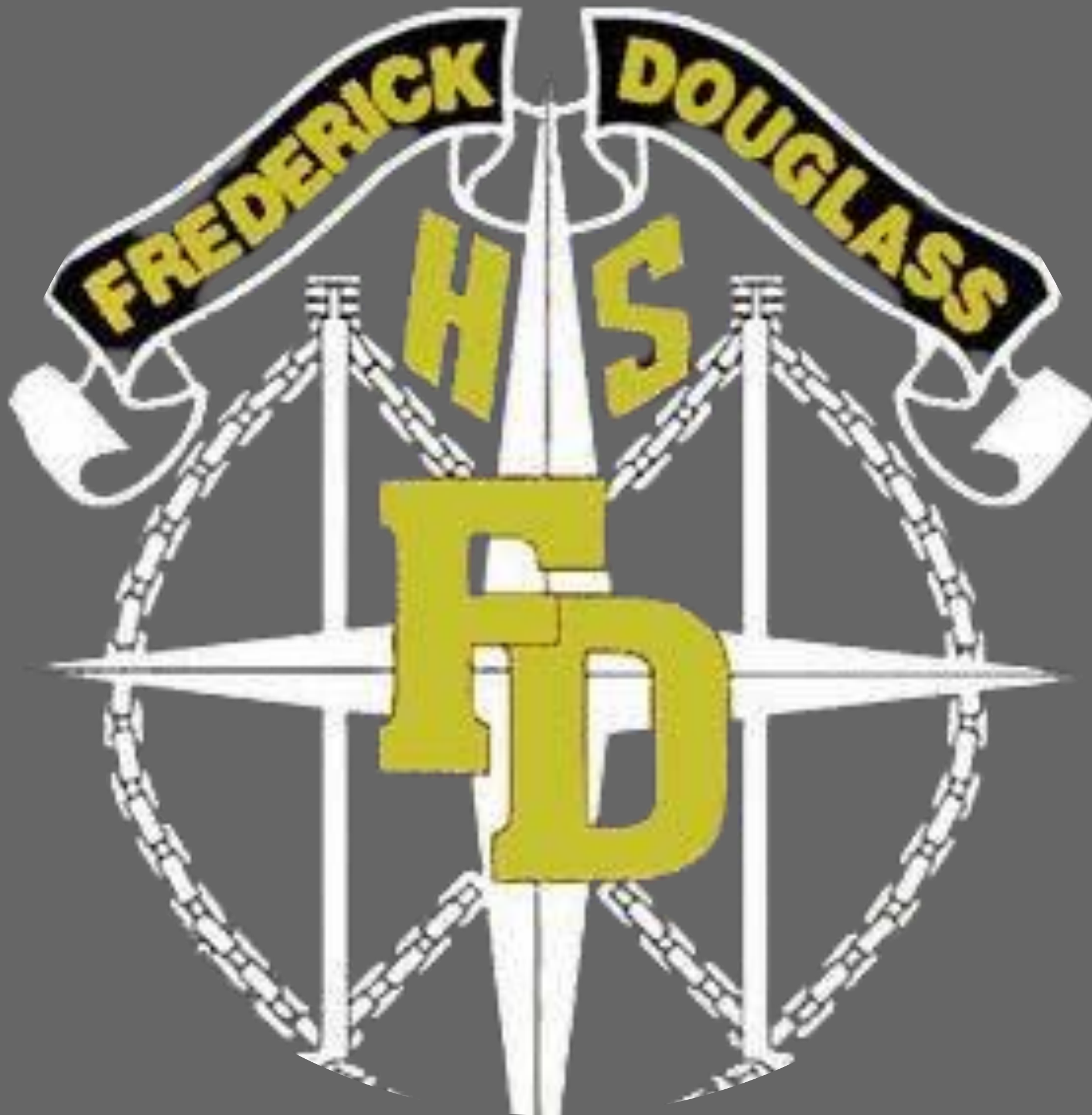




9th Grade STEAM Academy Pilot: An Innovative Approach to Rebuilding Success

Forrestella Taylor, Interim Principal
April 11, 2022

Revised April 8, 2022

Purpose

Review current academic and school climate data at Douglass High School and discuss a proposal for short and long-term changes.

Roadmap

1. Review current Douglass High School academic and school climate data.
2. Discuss interventions implemented to date.
3. Present short and long-term solutions to address current challenges and build on the history and strengths of Douglass High School.

Takeaway

To understand the rich history and current challenges at Douglass High School and determine the best path forward.



Douglass High School has a long history of excellence and Astro Pride

Notable Alumni

Leaders

- '82 - Bernice King: Attorney, author, minister
- '87 - Keisha Lance Bottoms: Former Mayor of Atlanta
- '82 - Leslie Smith: Major General US Army
- '84 – Michael Julian Bond and Andrea Boone, Atlanta City Council
- '03 - Courtney English, former Chair of ABOE

Athletes

- '97 - Jamal Lewis: NFL Running Back
- '94 - Milton Campbell: Track Athlete and Record Holder
- '88 - Harold Ellis: NBA Shooting Guard

Artists

- '80 - Sonny Emory: Musician, Composer
- '88 - Lil John, Music Artist

Astro Pride

Current 9th Grade Class

- 11 students projected to graduate early
- 15 students competing in engineering competitions
- 38 students meeting or exceeding MAP growth targets

Tale of a future Douglass Graduate

- Track & Swim Team Captain
- Student Governance
- Member of Douglass Chorus
- Harvard Bound
- Embodies Douglass

However, recent academic, behavioral, and safety challenges threaten this rich history

1. Douglass High School is currently performing at the bottom 5% of high schools in the state as identified by the Georgia Department of Education and listed as a Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) school.

- Average Daily Attendance (78.6%/75.6%)
- OSS Rate (3.73/5.52%)
- Failure Rates (49.2%/52.7%)
- Graduation Rate (69.0%)

1. Concerns surrounding school safety continue to present a challenge to the overall learning environment.

School Climate Data¹

Students

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
During the past 30 days, I feel safe in my school.				49%	50%
I feel safe in my school.	66%	72%	69%		
I have been concerned about my physical safety at school.	52%	59%	54%	60%	66%
I have been involved in a fight at school.	67%	66%	65%		
I have felt unsafe at school or on my way to or from school.	57%	65%	59%	63%	65%
I have observed a fight at school.	26%	23%	26%		
I have worried about other students hurting me.	70%	77%	71%	74%	74%
Students at my school fight a lot.	23%	33%	28%	26%	30%

1 - Georgia School Climate Survey

School Climate Data¹

Staff

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
I feel safe at my school.	71%	76%	54%	46%	49%
I feel safe when entering and leaving my school building.	84%	91%	72%	63%	61%
I have been concerned about my physical safety at my school.	33%	50%	34%	27%	36%
If I report unsafe or dangerous behaviors, I can be sure the problem will be taken care of.	70%	79%	71%	64%	47%
Some students carry weapons (e.g. guns or knives) at my school.	36%	60%	21%	17%	22%

1 - Georgia School Climate Survey

Graduation Data

- 11 students projected to graduate early
- 148 students off-track for graduation

	Current Enrollment	Repeat 9 th	Repeat 10 th	Repeat 11 th
Cohort 2022	199			
Cohort 2023	222			27
Cohort 2024	230		28	
Cohort 2025	419	93		
TOTAL	1070			

Climate and Graduation Data

	Attendance	1 or more incidents of OSS	% of Core Failures	% Dropout Rate	% Graduation Rate
Cohort 2018	85.9%	153	49.1%	35%	69.9%
Cohort 2019	83.6%	48	74.4%	26%	63.7%
Cohort 2020	83.1%	169	72.0%	38%	76.6%
Cohort 2021	78.9%	128	61.4%	26%	69.0%
Cohort 2022	82.9%	118	66.7%		
Cohort 2023	80.0%	105	53.8%		
Cohort 2024	82.9%	1	69.9%		
Cohort 2025*	74.6%	215	52.7%		

Gang Activity Concerns

- Majority of fights and non-favorable activity overflows from the community into the school
- Gang recruitment is heavily influenced by compounding factors related to the Douglass Community
 - Demographics
 - Family issues
 - Student mindset
 - Peer association

What have we tried...?

Summer Bridge Programs

Ninth Grade Introductory Programs

Buddy systems

Counseling and mentoring by staff,
business partners, or outside agencies.

Credit recovery & personalized learning

Dedicated 9th Grade floor/wing.



The challenges at Douglass HS are not unique

More students fail ninth grade than any other year within the K-12 pipeline.

Research conducted in urban districts suggests that as many as 40% percent of students fail to get promoted from ninth to tenth grade on time.

Fewer than 20% of those students recover from failure and go on to graduate thus, becoming dropouts.

9th Grade coincides with life-course changes, such as reduced parental supervision and increased peer influence.

Unsuccessful 9th grade transitions are correlated with repeating the grade, disconnecting from school, and dropping out.

Organization of some high schools can create a major source of students' difficulty.

What else is needed...?

In Progress

- Special supports for students identified as at-risk.
- Increased initiatives for personalized learning in order to provide a good match to each student's motivation and capabilities.
- Increased focus on dropout prevention initiatives and programs through aligned resources and partnerships.

Proposal

- Development of smaller learning communities.
- Implementation of a 9th Grade STEAM Academy.
- A broader strategy for revisioning the high school experience for students.



What is our long-term vision for Douglass students?

Students who complete their education in a high-quality STE(A)M learning environment

Excel Academically

We take challenging courses that prepare us for college, career, and life; this includes honors, accelerated, advanced placement, and dual enrollment courses. We reflect, self-assess our progress, and persist toward our academic goals. We take ownership of our learning.



Think Critically

We have the competence to think in complex ways and apply the knowledge and skills we learn to perplexing unknowns.



Solve Problems Creatively

We generate solutions creatively and take actions to solve problems that help develop our academic skills, abilities, and knowledge. We focus our problem-solving on important issues related to our school, our local community, and the global society in which we live.



Investigate Thoroughly

We conduct research and investigations, make arguments from evidence, collect and analyze data in order to draw conclusions based on logic and facts.



Communicate Effectively

We communicate our ideas and research findings orally, in writing, and through the use of technology. We also advocate for resources based on our personal and academic needs.



Collaborate Strategically

We work with our peers, teachers, and business/industry professionals to develop our skills, abilities, and knowledge and broaden our perspectives and opportunities.



Utilize Technology

We utilize a wide variety of technological devices to communicate and solve problems. We are not just consumers of technology but create and innovate through the use of technology.



Compete Willingly

We enhance our educational experience by participating in a variety of extra-curricular activities. We compete in fairs, exhibitions, and other events that help us develop leadership and teamwork skills, along with other essential skills for college, careers, and life.



Proposal Overview

Short-Term (SY22-23)

Long-Term (SY23-26)

Proposal

- Pilot a 9th grade STEAM Academy, temporarily located at the former Fain Elementary School site.
- Hire a dedicated 9th grade STEAM Academy Administrator and faculty
- Provide explicit academic, social-emotional, and wrap-around, and high-school transition supports.

- Design a community-driven, research-based process to reimagine the student experience at Douglass.
- Identify proven innovations in applied learning, personalized learning, culture, and climate.
- Collaborate with the Douglass Cluster schools and the University of Virginia to identify and engage research-based practices needed to execute design thinking and planning through the levers of system leadership, support and accountability, effective talent management, and instructional infrastructure.

Rationale

- A dedicated 9th grade STEAM Academy will allow for more personalized support, allow for more targeted wrap around supports, ease the transition into high school, and decrease the elevated dropout rate.

- The challenges with the high-school experience require bold, whole-school innovations to ensure equitable outcomes for all students.

Goals

- Improved academic outcomes for 9th graders
- Improved attendance and behavior outcomes for 9th graders
- Improved academic and climate outcomes as students transition from 9th grade academy into Douglass High School

- Improved academic and climate outcomes for all Douglass High School students
- STEAM Certification
- Increased graduation rate

Why pilot a 9th grade STEAM academy?

[The Preventable Failure](#), September 2021, UChicago Consortium for on School Research

- **Finding 1:** Ninth grade is marked by dramatic changes in students' course performance in a very short period of time; with course failure as a frequent outcome¹
- **Finding 2:** There is a strong link between grade declines in ninth grade, grade failure, and high school graduation; the transition to high school is a place where students “get stuck.”²
- **Finding 3:** The transition to high school presents 14-year-olds with an entirely new set of tasks that they must manage, involving a ratcheting up of developmental demand with little support from adults.³

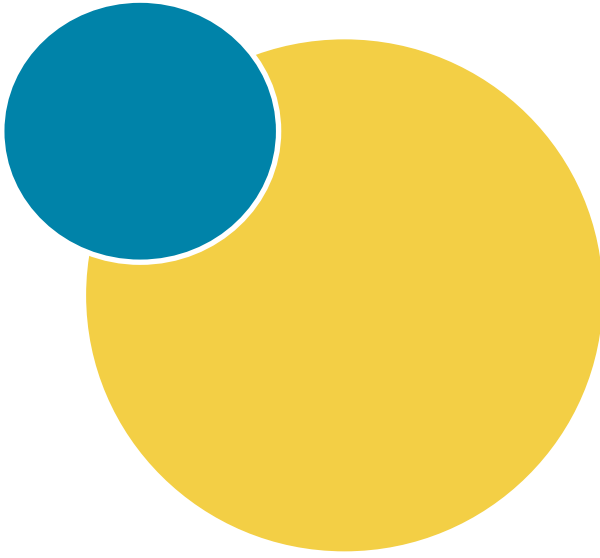
An increased emphasis on 9th grade can support academics, school culture, and social-emotional development at Douglass High School

1 Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford (1983); Eccles, Lord, & Midgley (1991); Feldlaufer, Midgley, & Eccles (1988); Felner, Ginter, & Primavera (1982); Roderick (1994); Schulenberg, Asp, & Petersen (1984); Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman (1994); Simmons, Black, & Zhou (1991); Simmons, & Blyth (1987)

2 Neild et al. (2008).

3 Rosenkranz, de la Torre, Stevens, & Allensworth (2014)..

Why pilot a 9th grade STEAM academy?



A better way to transition from Middle School to High School

- Separate schools eases the academic and social transition for high school bound students
- Fewer influences and distractions from older students (bullying, gang activity) and mixing with upperclassmen in common areas

More personalization

- Reduces administration to student ratio from 1:450 to 1:150.
- Reduces social worker to student ratio from 1:550 to 1:300.
- Creates a smaller learning environment and opportunity to “seed” a strong culture in 9th grade that will be strengthened in grades 10-12
- Provides opportunity for tiered intervention teams.
- Decreases anonymity while increasing students’ sense of community and relationship building

A dedicated 9th grade academy allows for greater personalization of the learning experience, while supporting deeper relationships and supports

Why pilot the 9th grade campus off-site in SY22-23?

- Moving 9th graders off-site will support addressing immediate safety concerns and rebuilding systems and culture
- The current Douglass campus is not configured to provide 9th graders with a dedicated space, requiring a location at Fain
- 9th Grade students often get lost in the corridors and classrooms of already massive high schools and resolve to chronic skipping.
 - Fain Building – 83,782 sq ft
 - FDHS Campus – 336,101 sq ft



How will we implement this pilot?

Financial Implications

	One Time Cost Amount		Recurring/Operational Cost Amount		
	FY 2022		FY 2023		
Item	CARES	GENERAL FUND	CARES	GENERAL FUND	CURRENT SCHOOL ALLOCATION
Facilities	\$ 2,237,214.16	\$ 455,028.00	\$ -	\$ 98,135.74	\$122,400.00
Transportation	\$ -	\$ 114,000.00	\$ -	\$ 2,734,000.00	\$ -
Safety/Security	\$ 186,000.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$160,000
Technology	\$ 253,928.21	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 50,000.00	\$ -
Academics/Instructional Technology	\$ 196,650.00	\$ 9,000.00	\$ -	\$ 129,163.00	\$ -
Human Resources	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 643,700.00	\$ 530,663.00
Branding/Communications	\$ -	\$ 60,000.00	\$ -	\$ 40,000.00	\$ -
Athletics					
Academics/Student Services	\$ 10,000.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 27,500.00
GRAND TOTAL	\$ 2,883,792.37	\$ 638,028.00	\$ -	\$ 3,694,998.74	\$ 840,563.00

How will we implement this pilot?

Transportation Implications

APS School Buses

- Will serve the Douglass 9th grade STEAM Academy (101 Hemphill Rd. NW) and Douglass High School main campus (225 H.E. Holmes Dr.).
- 16 total routes serving transportation eligible DHS students on an 8:45 a.m. – 3:45 p.m. proposed bell schedule.
- All 9th grade STEAM Academy students participating in afterschool athletics/ extracurricular activities at Douglass HS main campus will have access to a daily bus shuttle.
- APS school buses will continue to serve all Douglass HS/cluster special education students.
- APS will serve Douglass High School extracurricular and athletic field trip needs.

Vendor School Buses

- Will serve John Lewis Invictus Academy with 22 total bus routes on a 9:15 a.m. – 4:15 p.m. bell schedule and support selected Douglass cluster elementary runs.
- The vendor buses will be parked in the rear parking area of Douglass HS (225 H.E. Holmes Dr.).



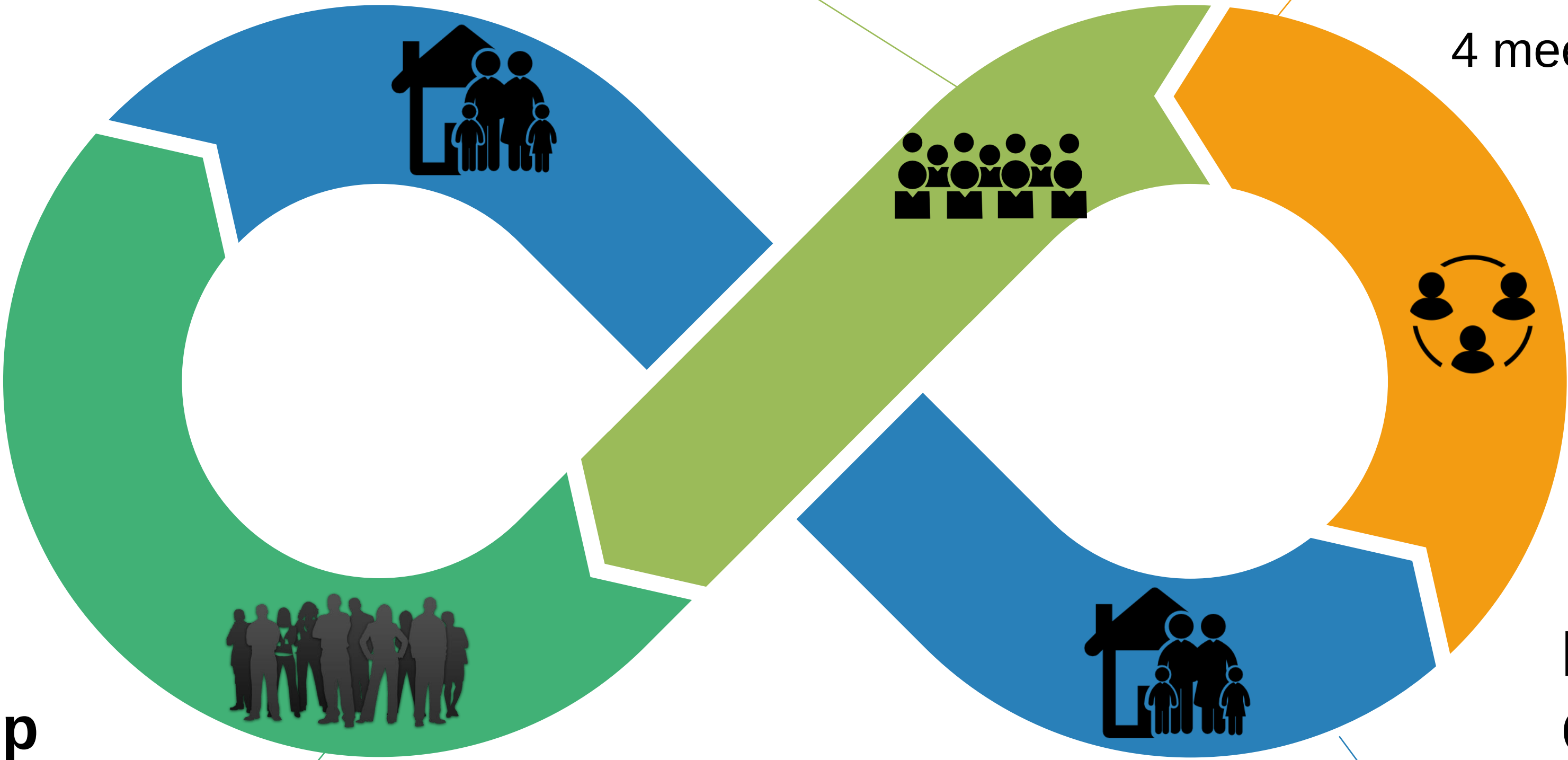
Extensive stakeholder input was gathered

Student and Parent Focus Groups

7 meetings with 535 participants

Alumni Town Halls

4 meetings and 34 participants



Community Group Meetings

7 meetings with 74 participants

District Working Groups

4 meetings with 52 participants

Stakeholder Voice

- *“Great idea! My student has struggled this year with the transition. He is overwhelmed and a smaller environment would have helped him” (Parent)*
- *“I think we need this at Douglass. If we move forward, we need to have a rubric to guide and measure our efforts.” (Staff)*
- *“ I went to a 9th grade academy when I was in High School, and it was great! Our students need this because they are simply not prepared once they get here.” (Staff)*
- *“I think it is a good idea, but we need to make sure that students with special needs get what they need at both places.” (Parent)*
- *“I definitely think it is a good idea. It would have helped me.” (Student)*
- *“I didn’t feel comfortable coming to Douglass and it’s alot! I wish I would have had something like this for me when I was a freshman.” (Student)*
- *“Will the kids still be able to play sports like football and track?” (Parent)*
- *“Excellent idea. I think it will help with the behavior and better prepare the students.” (STAFF)*
- *“I think this will help us strengthen the collaboration between JLIA and the High School and better support our kids.” (Staff – JLIA)*
- *“The community has got to step up and support the schools; especially this. Most of the issues in our schools are coming out the community. I support this idea!” (Parent-JLIA & FDHS)*
- *“If a 9th Grade Academy is at another site, we need to make certain that there is consistent leadership for both schools to ensure that there is one consistent vision casted across both campuses.” (Alumni)*

Stakeholder Voice

- *“I’m just ready to get back to NORMAL high school. These kids [9th Grade] are doing the most!” (Student)*
- *“Most 9th graders are not really ready for the transition to high school, but this is different; especially after the pandemic.” (Staff)*
- *“ I’m glad to see the district is actually supporting something different for our kids. This cluster, OUR COMMUNITY; has been ignored for so many years. We can’t keep doing things the same if we expect change. (Community Member)*
- *“I don’t want to send my child to 9th grade...not yet. It’s just not safe and I know he’s out here running the streets.” (Parent)*
- *“It feels like we are being punished for what these Freshmen doing. We were bad but not like this!” (Student)*
- *“I wish I would have cared more about my grades when I was in 9th Grade. I’m in 11th grade but my ID says I’m in the 9th grade still cause I gotta catch up on my credits. Real talk though...I know I messed up.” (Student)*
- *“I feel like I got to be about it or else I’m gone get GOT! PERIOD. I hate this place.” (Student)*
- *“This is embarrassing. We can’t do nothing cause these kids don’t know how to act. I just want to go to a normal school and do normal things” (Student)*
- *“Our scholars are so far behind and yet they are never here which is frustrating. I feel like the district has forgotten about us and all of their attention is focused on the more affluent clusters and whatever those parents want, they get. Our kids need something different because they are worth it. This just might be a step in the right direction.” (Teacher, Alumni)*

Why invest in a broader process to reimagine the high school experience at Douglass?

- Urban districts across the country, from DC Public Schools to Denver Public Schools have concluded that traditional High School Models do not work for all kids
- The global pandemic has increased our commitment to the power of personalized learning, relevant and applicable curricula, and deep investments in mental health and student wellness
- Reimagining the end-to-end student experience will lead to more powerful results than incremental, and potentially disconnected, changes to the school model

Spotlight: DC Public Schools' launched a partnership to rethink all high schools.



“The nation’s schools were not designed with the science of learning in mind. Lagging student engagement and student performance reflect this shortcoming. Yet, educators and policymakers can correct this failure by leading work at the intersection of school redesign and the science of learning, implementing better policy structures as well as improved education programs. Today’s students cannot afford another missed opportunity.” - Center for American Progress

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Closing & Next Steps

9th Grade STEAM Academy (Current Work Progress)

- Reconfigure Fain Elementary School for High School
- Hire and/or train STEAM-based teachers
- Prepare for the summer bridge program, taking place on main campus

Long-term Considerations

- Ongoing engagement with school and community stakeholders
- Explore reconfiguration of Douglass Campus to accommodate 9th grade academy
- Work with strategic partners to support a community-driven reimagining process for Douglass
- Evaluate impact of 9th grade STEAM Academy pilot and share lessons with other APS high schools to scale successful practices

Questions?

Appendix

- 35% of middle school students identify themselves as gang affiliated or students who consider themselves to be part of a gang in their schools.
- 45% of high school students state that they are either gang affiliated or are familiar with gang activity within the school.
- Gang members encounter each other at school during class changes, in the lunchroom, in common areas, and during attempts to conduct assemblies and school events.
- Conflicts often occur between rival gangs. In some instances, gang members come to school to engage in criminal behavior or to confront rivals.
- Failing to adequately address gang problems can lead to increased risk of victimization in the school setting for both students and staff members.

*National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse

Dropout Prevention

- Efforts mostly focus on identifying and providing interventions to students who have fallen off the track to graduation.
- Identification involves use of “early warning systems” (e.g., students receiving poor grades in or failing core subjects, low attendance, grade retention, and disengagement from instruction).
- Students of color from low-income families and communities are disproportionately represented.
- Research on early warning systems suggests that future dropouts can be identified as early as sixth grade and that responding quickly to indicators of disengagement can prevent academic and behavior problems.