Berkshire County Educational Task Force

Portrait of a Graduate project

Focus Group Results, April-June 2020

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Berkshire Youth Leadership Program Focus Groups

Section 1: Summary

Overview
The Berkshire Youth Leadership Program (BYLP) is a 10-month program for selected juniors from Berkshire County’s high schools. The program prepares students to be community leaders and educates them about career opportunities. Participants are selected based on their capacity for leadership development both in and out of the classroom, and must meet minimum GPA and attendance requirements to be considered for the program. Each BYLP session focuses on a different sector of the economy. The education sector was featured at the April 28, 2020 session, which was conducted virtually on Zoom. The guest speakers included the three core facilitators from the Portrait of a Graduate project and representatives of MCLA and BCC.

Methodology
Student focus groups: After an initial presentation to the whole BYLP group about job opportunities in education, students were divided into four breakout groups that each had 6-8 participants. A total of 28 students participated in the focus groups, which lasted for approximately 40 minutes. The focus groups were led by the Portrait of a Graduate core facilitators -- Jane McEvoy (Lee Middle/High), Kim Roberts-Morandi (North Adams Public Schools) and Brendan Sheran (Pittsfield High) – along with Tim Callahan (BYLP Advisory Committee member and Principal of Drury High). Each facilitator posed up to eight questions to their group and took notes on the discussion.

Adult focus groups: Adults who were present at the session participated in a fifth focus group, with a separate set of questions. This group was facilitated by Mary Nash (project consultant) and Jake Eberwein (project director). The participants in this focus group were Jackie Kelly and Nick Stroud (MCLA), Ben Lamb and Kevin Pink (1Berkshire), and Karen Ruiz-Leon (BCC).

Key themes and results
Ten themes emerged from the discussions. Further detail of what was discussed in the focus groups is provided in Section 2.

1. The quality of the educational experience for students goes well beyond academics. Clubs, events, sports, and field trips are all an important part of the school experience and help in skill development.

2. Connections with teachers are a crucial part of the high school experience. Students report that teachers are caring, attentive, and supportive.

3. Students want access to a greater variety of courses. They would like more choices in areas that are of interest to them. Some want more arts classes, engineering, science; some feel there is too much focus on STEM. The smaller schools could use more Advanced Placement classes.

4. All students need to have real world, life skills. Cooking, budgeting, finances, and self-care are important skills. All students should have these classes, not just those who are not college-bound.

5. Students also need a variety of soft skills. These include communications skills, time management, leadership skills, work ethic, and the ability to collaborate and work in teams.
6. **School staff and curriculum need to reflect the students they serve.** Students of color thrive when they see themselves reflected in the staff and in books they read. Cultural competency education for staff is needed.

7. **Career experiences are helpful and should be more frequent.** More help in identifying career options is needed as well as more internship opportunities. The types of career activities offered by BYLP would be helpful for a larger group of students.

8. **Guidance in the college application process is needed.** Need help earlier than senior year to understand what they need to do; follow-up to college nights would be helpful.

9. **More help is needed for students who are not college bound.** Guidance should reach out to them. Certification programs should be available so that they graduate with a credential.

10. **Input is needed from students who are not graduating from high school.** The BYLP group is a high achieving group. It is important to find out how to reach students who face obstacles in succeeding in high school.

Section 2: Discussion

**BYLP STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS**

1. **What makes you most proud about your high school?**

**TEACHERS**
- They are approachable.
- Teacher and student relationships – social aspect with learning and guiding.
- Teachers care about grades we get.
- Teachers are open and giving. We get lots of individual attention.
- Kind and supportive teachers who always greet us at their doors.
- At least two teachers I can go to for emotional support on each floor.

**RESPECTING DIFFERENCES**
- The teachers in special education program really care for the kids with special needs.
- School is open and welcome to LGBTQ.
- Students do not pick on or bully others who are different. Very accepting of everyone.
- Accepting of differences – Best Buddies program.
- Welcoming to all social groups. How accepting everyone is.

**SCHOOL PRIDE /SENSE OF COMMUNITY**
- The PHS pride. I’m proud of the community of PHS.
- Class bonding days with teams - Kahoot, field day, spirit day. Builds sense of community.
- Unique school.

**ABLE TO HAVE A VOICE**
- I have a voice in my school.
- Everyone can express their opinion. You aren’t judged.
- Students stand up for what they believe in.
- The amount of support and freedom during protests.
FRIENDLY SETTING
• Small size of our school gives you a well-known feeling.
• Small classes, casual/informal setting.
• Everyone is nice--no one sits alone at lunch. How nice everyone is.

COURSE OFFERINGS
• AP offerings
• Number of voc/tech shops offered
• Diversity of options

2. What high school experiences have you had that will be most helpful for you in pursuing future plans for college and career?

CLASSES
• AP courses. College courses are offered at the school -- my favorite class. Work is hard but fun.
• The freedom to choose classes – Psychology prepares me for my career.
• Online classes as electives (ex: psychology, geography) prep us for the reality of our online world.
• Partnership with Simon’s Rock. Seminar course and philosophy course. Professor is in contact with us three days a week and the other two we work independently.
• Doing projects with other people – being able to work with people and compromise is very useful.
• PE class – a good break during the day.
• Music and art classes and theater.
• Public speaking unit in English class.
• Wide range of options.

CLUBS/ACTIVITIES
• Clubs and events make me feel comfortable interacting with others and with public speaking.
• Many opportunities to lead--plan events, pep rallies, dances, etc. through clubs (Social Justice Club, Theater, Student Government)
• Social networking--ability to meet and talk with visiting speakers and guests.
• My club interests and participation has sparked my interest in environmental science.
• In theater learned courage to express myself.
• BYLP – meeting new people.
• Unconventional events, field trips.
• Student government and class councils.

SPORTS
• Learned assertiveness, determination, and to be goal-oriented through sports.
• Leadership and bonds made with other players through sports.
• Social networking with other teams, also through sports.

COLLEGE & CAREER PREP
• Skills USA.
• Work based field experience, co-ops.
• We need strategies to help prepare us for college, especially in writing.
• College planning night to walk everyone through the process would be helpful. Would be great if someone followed up with families a month after college night to see if progress is being made.
• Through BYLP learned about different job opportunities in Berkshire County. Hadn’t thought of staying after graduation, but now I am.
• Internships – trying different ones – to test to see if I would enjoy the career

3. What additional kinds of experiences would be helpful?

CLASSES
• More class options – we just have the core classes.
• Many students agreed that financial courses would have been helpful – how to do taxes, balance a checkbook, pay bills, manage money.
• A finance course should be part of requirements and not an elective.
• Home Economics would be helpful. Should cover cooking, budgeting, finances.
• Math teachers focus on core content, don’t have time for finance lessons, more practical math.
• If we knew our career path we should be able to customize class choices to learn things that would matter in our career.
• More room to change schedule to meet career interests.
• AP help through more directed writing instruction would be good.

COLLEGE PREP
• College planning program that starts in 9th grade would be helpful.
• More information about college prior to senior year. No one talks about college until we are seniors.
• I want to be a theater major and to do that, I need to prepare my application five months before senior year. No one told me that or helped me with that. We need to know early on in high school what we need to do to get to where we want to go.
• Test prep, especially more SAT prep, because online prep and programs fill up fast.
• ACT currently not offered and would be helpful.
• Life skills around college applications and resumes.

CAREER PREP
• More internship opportunities than just a job shadow day.
• More exposure to different career options, more ways to figure out what you want to do.
• Connections to job and work.
• Guidance should help more with providing us with career options. I often ask why I am doing this or that in school.
• Guidance needs to do more for non-AP kids to help them plan for the future. They should reach out to kids who don’t know what they want or how to get there.
• More certification programs so that non-college bound kids leave with more than just a diploma.
• School leaves it up to us to decide what we want to do. We have to be self-motivated and advocate for ourselves. I struggle with self-motivation and don’t know what to advocate for.
• Guidance should provide us with more career options and information about how to get there. This would motivate me because sometimes I sit in class and wonder why I am here.

EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE OF CLASSROOM
• More outside classes – stuck inside classrooms and forced
• More real-world experiences through structured programs like formal internships in fields that interest us. Guidance should be stronger about making these opportunities happen.
• Kids should be included in decision-making, plans for the school year, budgets, major events.
• Nobody wanted to do YLP but if we weren’t pushed into it we wouldn’t have learned so much – we need to be pushed outside of comfort zone.
• More hands-on experiences.
• More unconventional things – do things to get out of the classroom.
• More field trips – trying new things getting out, learning new things.
• Subject oriented field trips – based on student interest.
• Hands-on experiences that are more than craft projects – go to places and see in action.

HELP WITH VIRTUAL LEARNING
• During virtual learning, my honors math teacher has not reached out to us at all. We have had no classwork since we closed. I am worried about getting into college. I planned to take calculus next year, but now I don’t feel prepared, so I am taking statistics instead.
• In some cases, teachers need to be more involved with their students. The school has been told about this, but they did nothing. The school needs to be more involved too.

4. What do you feel are the most important personal qualities you should have by the end of school in order to be prepared for the future?

COMMUNICATION SKILLS
• Being communicative and having strong communication skills.
• Communication skills, the ability to make and keep a strong network of friends, even if it is a small group of friends--the ability to build strong relationships.
• To be confident in a polarized world, able to stick up for yourself and what you believe in.
• Social aspect and building relationships. Social skills to meet new people and make connections.

MANAGING TIME
• Scheduling and time management.
• Manage your time, work, and yourself and be organized – learn to set your own schedule.

COLLABORATION
• Collaboration, communication, group problem solving, to be able to work with diverse individuals, to be able to seek help/answers when you need it.
• To get along with others, to be able to work with them, even if you don’t like them.
• Professional skills – working collaboratively on projects.

STRENGTH AND INDEPENDENCE
• Strong work ethic so you can respond to what life throws at you.
• Open-mindedness and determination. Sometimes I am too passive in school, like I don’t raise my hand even when I know the answer in class. I don’t know why I do this.
• Develop a sense of independence and how to take care of ourselves – Home Economics classes haven’t been replaced with anything.

OTHER QUALITIES/SKILLS
• Open-mindedness. In our school populations (meaning lack of diversity) we need to learn to be open to new ideas and perspectives.
• Exposure to real world situations, to learn about work world.
• Ability to ask for help. Self-advocacy.
• Basic math.
• Being reliable.
• Well-being, self-care
5. If you could improve one learning opportunity or program at your HS, what would it be and why?

COURSE VARIETY AND EXPANSION
- Wider variety of courses: sociology, psychology, history of art. Creative courses.
- Science program should have more useful labs so we can be hands on.
- English coursework expansion.
- We have a lot of AP and CP courses but not as many for the honors level
- Need more AP in the smaller schools.
- More arts programs—visual and performance. STEM is way too big of a focus.
- Too much focus on STEM. We need to be more humanities-oriented. Not everyone is interested in a STEM career. I love writing and could write a 2,000-word essay about just about anything.
- More performing arts, including theater classes—performance and theater tech.
- Academic offerings geared too heavily toward college. Need course offerings that fall between CP and AP (like honors) for kids who want to challenge themselves but not ready for AP class.
- More focus on communications and presentation skills.

HOME ECONOMICS/REAL WORLD SKILLS
- Gym is mandatory, but Home Economics is not.
- We need classes in how to pay a bill, take out a loan, manage a budget (financial literacy). For some of us, our parents can teach us these things, but not all of us.
- We are being sent out into the world blind about what we need to do to survive in it.
- Because of college requirements and an emphasis on AP and other advanced classes for college-bound students, we don’t get the opportunity to learn important real-world skills.
- More opportunities to learn about interpersonal relations, like public speaking.

INVEST IN MORE RESOURCES
- Better machines, shop supplies.
- More funds for technology and project supplies.
- Improve the school building, improve heating.

CLUBS
- Environmental club. It is so important now. Make school more sustainable and greener.
- Anti-defamation league for our school needs work. Club is good but participating means we miss class once a month to work with our middle school students. Missing class hurts.

COLLEGE READINESS
- More college readiness so it doesn’t seem so scary.
- Guidance pushes AP classes instead of focusing on what we want to do in college and career.

6. Do you feel you are getting the guidance you need from your school to make future plans for what you do after high school? Please explain.

NEED MORE HELP IN GENERAL
- Not enough guidance because we don’t know what we need.
- Some people might have different answers but I didn’t receive enough help.
- Opportunities exist for guidance but hard to schedule time. So many kids need help but if you can’t access it then it’s not useful.
- Continual checking is needed.
YES, GETTING HELP

• A lot of guidance and support through school counselors.
• Getting guidance through programs such as BYLP.
• Good connections with coaches and teachers.

HELP WITH COLLEGE APPLICATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

• Needed to know how to fill out a college application and what colleges have which programs – I had to figure that out on my own.
• I’m not really sure what to be ready to do in college.
• Our school ran a seminar on the application process, but not enough in school about how to fill out applications and write college essays.
• At PHS there is a chance to write college essays because of one teacher but it’s not for everyone.
• I need to know what is expected – what it’s going to be like.
• Only one or two classes give you the college experience, most don’t give the college experience at all.

HELP WITH SPECIFIC RESOURCES

• Help setting up internships. Asking us to do it ourselves isn’t fair since we don’t yet know how to do it.
• Naviance and College Board is a resource but students have to seek it out.
• 20-minute free period we have each day could be used for Naviance or College Board interacting online and guidance could work with students during this time.

HELP IF NON-COLLEGE BOUND

• If you aren’t college-bound there isn’t much help. (3 students said this.)
• Not enough guidance – most things are usually just classes to prepare for college but they may not be useful – I don’t even know if I want to go to college.

7. What do you feel are the most important academic skills you should have by the end of school to be prepared for the future?

COMMUNICATIONS: Writing is important in every field, presentation, public speaking, people skills.
BROAD SKILL SET: Jack of all trades and master of none. All core subjects. More course variety.
OTHER: Note taking, how to balance too little/too much work or prep for college. Taxes and other “real things” you can do with math.

8. Do you feel challenged by your classes and is there enough variety of courses to keep you interested?

CHALLENGE LEVEL IS MIXED, AP VERY CHALLENGING

• Would like something more than AP chemistry, what’s next after that.
• Some classes are easy and some harder as they go. Some challenging, some not.
• AP English is really challenging, there is so much work.
• AP assignments take so much time there is little time for our other courses.
• AP really draws you away from your other studies.
• Classes not challenging most of the time.

MORE VARIETY IS DESIRED

• Variety in courses should be expanded year to year.
• Would be better to have a course offered only every two years in order to have more variety.
• I can go do it even if it’s not part of the curriculum.
• Would like to see more:
branches of psychology, options to go deeper
- engineering classes
- music, vocal classes
- different kinds of science

FACE-TO-FACE PREFERRED OVER VIRTUAL
- Face-to-face is better. Face-to-face or nothing.
- Better if they have video chat, but otherwise you feel you are on your own.

ADULT FOCUS GROUP
1. What are the most meaningful types of learning experiences for high school students today?

HANDS-ON LEARNING
- Project based experiences.
- Hands-on learning, not lectures.
- Getting to see organizations/programs in action.
- Co-curricular activities.

SOFT SKILLS
- Critical thinking
- Time management
- Interpersonal communication

NON-TRADITIONAL SETTING
- Positive Options program at BCC for those who don’t do well in a traditional high school setting.

LIFE SKILLS
- Balancing a checkbook
- Writing a cover letter
- Dressing appropriately for work.

2. In what ways do Berkshire high schools effectively prepare students for college and/or career? In what ways do you feel they are not prepared enough?

SOFT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT
- It is important to learn how to work in groups, teams and navigate difficulties that may arise. This includes listening to each other and debating without being disrespectful.
- More preparation is needed in time management, writing, research, study skills.
- When students arrive in college, they need to learn how to navigate for themselves. They gradually start to do this but it takes time.

CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS IS NEEDED
- Student need to learn to navigate cross-cultural differences and address issues of privilege and entitlement. When they get to college, they are exposed to a broader mix of students from different backgrounds and circumstances.
- Need to stop tokenizing students of color. They thrive when they see themselves represented.
• Some students don’t feel connected with the rest of the county. There is segregation among different parts of the county. In BYLP, there is the opportunity to work closely with others, but this doesn’t typically happen in other programs.

CURRICULUM MUST BE FLEXIBLE
• Curriculum needs to have more agility – be flexible to adapt to current needs rather than following only a preset curriculum.

3. What specific trends do you see in Berkshire County graduates who go on to attend BCC and MCLA? What kinds of additional skills would help them be successful?

BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY
• At BCC most non-traditional students look for a program of study that will put them out in the workforce immediately after graduation or simultaneously while attending college. These students tend to juggle school with work and caring for their families. They usually take longer than 2 or 2.5 years to get an associate degree.

NAVIGATING THE TRANSITION
• BCC has wonderful students who transfer to MCLA. They usually struggle with not knowing who is the right contact to help them with their needs at the next institution, so part of what I do is helping them get connected to their new system.

4. What knowledge, skills, and dispositions will our students need to thrive in a rapidly changing, unpredictable world?

DIVERSITY IN CURRICULUM AND STAFF
• Need to acknowledge that the making of our community has changed and will continue to change.
• Need to decolonize the curriculum, explore other authors, expose students to what else is out there.
• Students need to see themselves represented in the faculty, administrators. Youth of color do not stay in the area. These are the people that will make our future workforce.

SOFT SKILLS
• Listening skills
• Time management
• Must be easy to work with, a good team member
• Leadership skills, how to delegate
• Flexibility, adaptability to change, resource navigation
• Interpersonal skills

COMMUNICATION SKILLS
• Reacting and responding to situations, taking a breath, thinking about it
• Good writing skills and vocabulary
• Able to construct an argument
• Research skills

5. How can our schools strengthen our ability to provide high-quality education for all Berkshire County students in the face of challenges, such as shifting demographics and tight budgets?

EMPHASIZING SKILLS
• Strong writing and math
• Emphasis on lifelong skills
• Connections to the community, having students get involved with community organizations

ADDRESS CULTURAL DIVERSITY
• Address issues of equity and access. Exposure to different writers/authors.
• We need qualified staff and faculty of color on our campuses, not just hiring to meet quotas. The county does a poor job at retaining professionals of color so it is absurd to expect that our incoming diverse student body will stay here when there is almost no representation in the school and workforce systems.
• Students need to see themselves represented in the faculty and staff so that they can identify with them and have a sense of safety.

TRANSITION AND TRACKING OF NEXT STEPS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL
• Need to be prepared for what is next, transitions from high school to college, college to work
• Longitudinal tracking of data, tracking students in what they do after high school.

6. Do you have any thoughts on how schools can successfully address persistent achievement gaps among students?

NEED TO HEAR FROM THOSE NOT GRADUATING
• Important to address those who are not graduating from high school, how has the system failed them and what can we do about it.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY FOR STAFF
• Standardized measurements are unrealistic for students who struggle with violence in the home, food insecurity, and other circumstances. Schools should mandate cultural competency for all staff and understand the unspoken rules of constituents (think Bridges out of Poverty)

MAKE COLLEGE MORE AFFORDABLE
• Difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition is abysmal. Closing the gap would help a lot of students afford college.
Alumni Focus Groups

Section 1: Summary

Overview and Methodology
A survey was conducted in April 2020 among individuals who graduated from Berkshire County public schools in the past five years. The survey’s purpose was to get input from the respondents about their high school experience, how it has helped them with what they are doing now, and what knowledge, attributes, and experiences a high school graduate should have to succeed in the future. The survey was conducted as part of the Portrait of a Graduate grant that is being implemented by five Berkshire County high schools (Berkshire Arts and Technology Charter School, Drury, Lee, Pittsfield, and Taconic high schools). Funded by the Barr Foundation, the grant is focused on creating a collective vision of what high school students will know and be able to do by the time they graduate. While the survey was open to alumni of all Berkshire County public schools, distribution efforts were greatest among graduates of PoG schools, resulting in those schools having the highest response rates.

Among the 268 respondents to the survey, 66 indicated a willingness to participate in a follow-up virtual focus group. Mary Nash, the focus group facilitator, contacted volunteers and identified 16 who were available to participate in one of two focus groups on May 1 and May 8, 2020. Those who committed to participate are all either enrolled in a four-year college or graduate school, or working post-college. While there were 28 survey respondents who attended two-year colleges and five that indicated interest in being in a focus group, none of them were able to commit when contacted. With both the survey and the focus group being voluntary, the group that participated in the focus group was primarily higher achieving students or graduates of four-year colleges. Seventy-five percent of the participants were from the Portrait of a Graduate high schools. Jake Eberwein introduced the focus groups and helped facilitate the discussions.

Two focus groups were held: May 1 (8 attendees); May 8 (8 attendees)
Schools represented: Pittsfield (4); Lee (3); BART (2); Monument (2); Taconic (2); Drury (1); Hoosac Valley (1); Mt. Everett (1)
Gender breakdown: Male (5); Female (11)
Racial breakdown: White Caucasian (13); African American (2); Hispanic (1)
High school grad year: 2019 (4); 2018 (4); 2017 (2); 2016 (3); 2015 (2); 2014 (1)
Current plans of participants: 4-year private college (7)
4-year public college (4)
Graduate school (3)
Working (one is post college) (2)

Key themes and results
The following ten themes emerged from the discussions at the focus groups. Several of the themes are the same as those identified in the focus groups among high school students participating in the Berkshire Youth Leadership Program. Further detail on the topics discussed is provided in Section 2.

1. **Connections with teachers are a crucial part of the high school experience.** Alumni reported having strong connections with teachers. In some cases, they had the teachers for multiple classes and developed strong relationships.

2. **Alumni appreciated the benefits of taking Advanced Placement classes.** AP courses were excellent and provided good preparation for college.
3. **Some alumni felt underprepared in certain academic areas.** College level science labs are very challenging. Some of the other students in college have taken more specialized classes in science, math, business. College classes require skill in discussion, whereas high school classes are more lecture-based.

4. **Some students get stuck in lower tracks and should encouraged and supported more in moving up to higher level classes.** The advanced classes have all the same students. Other students could also handle this level of work. Many students of color were stuck on lower tracks.

5. **All students need to have real world, life skills.** Students at all levels need to have life skills in areas such as budgeting, finance, cooking, doing laundry.

6. **Students also need a variety of soft skills.** Independence, motivation, self-sufficiency, critical thinking, communication skills, and leadership are some of the skills that were mentioned.

7. **Time management is important in the transition from high school to college.** High school students balance their time somewhat equally between academics and extracurricular activities, whereas in college the majority of their time needs to go to academics. The schedule is more open.

8. **Career experiences are helpful and should be more frequent.** Career fairs, college visits, dual enrollment, and pathway programs were all beneficial. More help in understanding career choices and options should be provided through advising, guest speakers, mentoring, and alumni networks.

9. **Alumni felt that guidance departments were very helpful.** They care about students. Feedback on college essays and speed interviewing were helpful.

10. **College life requires strong networking skills.** Finding a leadership role in college activities and clubs is challenging. Would be helpful to know in advance how to connect with professors.

**Section 2: Discussion**

1. **What is something that your high school did really well and what is something your high school could have done better?**

**Did really well...**

**GUIDANCE**
- Good guidance office (Lee). Always help available. It’s unfamiliar territory for a lot of students.
- Great guidance department (Lee). Teachers really care about every student. They take the time to help with getting into college, working after high school. “They are there to help with whatever you’re doing, whether it’s life or school.”
- Very prepared in college application process (Lee).
- Strong guidance department (Drury).
- **Guidance helpful in applying to college (BART).** Feedback on college essay, speed interviewing. “Overall they did a really good job of preparing you for what it’s like to move on after graduation.”
RIGOROUS ACADEMICS
- Well prepared for academic rigor in higher education (Pittsfield). AP classes, dual enrollment, really focusing on content.
- PHS has lots of AP classes across different subjects. Introducing new ones. Encouraging all students to be involved in some type of extracurricular activities (sports, clubs, the arts) - good job.
- College prep courses were strong (Lee).
- AP programs were a highlight (Pittsfield). She was fortunate to participate in AP research capstone program, has helped her tremendously.
- AP program was excellent. AP research capstone experience has helped tremendously.
- Course load and rigor was high (Pittsfield) Was well prepared for college workload.
- AP Classes offer a lot of flexibility in college. Student is double majoring.

GOOD SUPPORTIVE TEACHERS
- Faculty was very encouraging, somebody was there to listen and challenge them (Taconic). Teachers very willing to be flexible. “I felt like I had someone there who could listen to me or someone who could challenge me and encourage me to try new things.”
- Small school and very connected to teachers. Teachers knew them by name.
- Some really great teachers who he had for more than one year in high school (Monument). That helped him make connections to teachers, place in high level college classes.
- Having some of the same teachers throughout middle and high school was a very powerful part of the high school experience (Mt. Everett)

COLLEGE AND CAREER EXPOSURE
- Sixth grade college tours exposed them to a college campus (BART). BART does college visits during each grade including tours, meeting faculty, lunch in dining hall.
- College preparation is strong (BART). Mandatory to pass a college class. “That gets you exposed to what college is like before you end up going and it allows you to adapt to the new learning environment.”
- Dual enrollment and strong connection with MCLA (Drury). New college and career center headed up by guidance. Reps of different colleges came in to give talks, help with application process.
- Business Pathways track was helpful (Taconic). Business Professionals of America allowed her to compete at national level. Took accounting and economics courses that set her up nicely for college.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY
- Great welcoming community (Monument). Extra things to do, with mini-communities within the school. Everything felt friendly. Helped to shape her college major because of extra-curriculars she did (theater, TV production). Monument has a lot of good programs.
- Small communities made it so that students feel very connected (Mt. Everett). Even knew school committee members by name. You don’t fall through the cracks.
- Incredible strong sense of community (Hoosac Valley). Sports helped to build a strong community. They went to Gillette Stadium in 2017 -- in weeks building up to it they felt like one big family. The community around extracurriculars such as sports was one of the best things.

Could have done better...

MORE ACCESS TO LIFE SKILLS AND VOC/TECH COURSES
- More knowledge of the real world would have been helpful (Monument). After studying education in college, she realizes the practical classes such as home economics and cooking were tracked more for non-college bound students and weren’t something she could do.
- Financial literacy should be offered for all students (Pittsfield).
• Improve real life skills - basic survival skills (Hoosac Valley). Laundry, cooking, sewing. Had a life skills class in 8th grade, funding was cut and classes like that was the first to go, money became an issue and they cut programs.
• Access to health science electives would have been helpful (Taconic). Non CTE students can now take vocational classes, but they couldn’t before.
• Wish they had learned more about life skills (Lee). This includes doing taxes, doing laundry.

STUDENTS GET STUCK IN LOWER TRACKS
• School should give students extra push to improve and do higher level classes (Taconic). Kids get stuck in tracks, same students in higher level classes. Was with different students only with sports and theater. AP programs prepared her well and friends could have benefited also. “Everyone is capable of doing well in these courses if the effort is there. Overall it would lead to a lot of academic success and personal success, just because of how much these classes have offered me.”
• Encourage more students to take AP classes (Pittsfield). Same people since 6th grade in advanced classes. You get stuck in a track. By the time you’re in high school, “If you haven’t taken pre-Algebra you’re not going to be able to take AP calculus.” Not diverse, only two students of color in the AP classes. “It would have been nice to see more students of color encouraged to take the AP classes.”
• Race, religion, sex, gender, very imbalanced (Pittsfield). Just because you were weak in 6th grade you got put on the lower track. Would like to see literature, staff represent minorities in the school.
• Same classes with same kids (Pittsfield). Sports and theater allowed for interaction with a different group of kids. Conversations about encouraging kids to challenges themselves…were AP self-selecting. High schools may be tracking.
• Kids have full capability to move up to AP, need the extra push (Pittsfield).

MORE RIGOR AND VARIETY IN CLASSES
• Wished there were more AP classes (BART). The number of AP classes is growing since she graduated. At the time she wished there were more.
• Academic rigor could have been harder (Drury). Took all AP and MCLA classes, but still surprised by how hard college was. Was a big jump. Didn’t have any experience in discussion type classes. All high school classes were lecture, taking notes. Need more opportunities for discussion (a big part of the college scene).
• More advanced math needed (Monument). Took the most advanced classes, got 5 on AP, but some peers were 2-3 semesters ahead of him based on what their schools offered in the area of math.
• Lack of AP classes, people to teach them (Lee). Resources are always tight.
• More AP classes and more diverse classes were needed (Taconic).

TEST PREP FOR BOTH ACT AND SAT
• School didn’t advertise ACT, only SATs (BART). Found ACT on his own and did a lot better. He credits his scores for being able to get him into college.
• Not much prep for SAT and ACT testing (Pittsfield). Could have done better if she had more resources and tools available to prepare.

PROVIDE AFTER-SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION
• More help is needed to make extracurricular activities accessible. Provide transportation, late buses like they do at elementary level. If you don’t have a car or a ride it’s hard to stay after school.

HELP FOR NON-COLLEGE BOUND STUDENTS
• College is not everything (Lee). High school worked for him…some are not college bound. Wish Lee had more programs for kids who were not college bound. He had friends who didn’t want to go to college but felt forced into that track.
ALUMNI NETWORKS
- Leverage alumni, people who care about education for career advice (Lee). Once you graduate, there isn’t much of a bridge to alumni from your high school. Many other students in college say that they learned about business through business people coming in and speaking. They can serve as mentors, coaches.

MORE HANDS-ON LEARNING
- Wish the school had provided more hands-on learning experiences (Pittsfield). Other college students had summer research experiences, did research in labs, gave them an advantage in their approach and mindset. Many college courses require group work – need practice in working with different personalities and managing time in a group.

ENCOURAGE GREATER APPRECIATION OF BERKSHIRES
- Teach students to appreciate the Berkshires (Mt. Everett). Took a hiking class in high school, also field trips that made her appreciate Berkshires. Many peers graduated with a negative feeling about Berkshires. Unfortunate that they don’t appreciate what Berkshires have to offer.

2. What challenges have you faced in making the transition from high school to college or work?

ACADEMIC PREPARATION
- No exposure to business (Lee). Business courses not available, only took personal finance. Was behind out of the gate. High schools could use alumni as way to create interest in future professions and pathways. Someone he could have reached out to would have been helpful. Unable to take business courses in high school - was not available. Had only taken personal finance.
- Atmospheric science would have been helpful (BART). Some kids had meteorology classes before coming into her college. Could have been good to focus on weather, climate change, something going beyond environmental science. Some had taken a class, some had not.
- Classroom discussion. Less exposure in high school to classroom discussion which is important in college.
- Lab experience was lacking (Drury). Now taking 5-hour organic chemistry lab with equipment she had never used – was nerve wracking.
- Writing preparation important. Now attending a technical college with a lot of scientific writing. It is important to know how to write and communicate. Sees others at college struggle, but is glad that BART gave him good background so that the transition was not difficult for him. “Writing and communication and knowing how to write clearly and cohesively – you need to know that in order to be successful in communicating your ideas in college.”
- Connecting with professors. Smaller classes in high school, teachers make lots of connections with students. Larger classes in college requires students to take the initiative to make connections. Could have been more guidance to teach you how to make personal connections with professors. He figured out part way through the year that he needed to do this, but wishes he had known sooner.

MENTAL HEALTH
- Challenge was with mental health. Would have liked to learn about how to take care of herself in college when you are working all the time. More conversation or course on offering pointers on how to take care of yourself, life skills, coping skills.
- Mental health. Needed more support for emotional intelligence.
- Life lessons. A lot of what they were taught in high school was to prepare for MCAS and AP tests rather than life lessons.
FINDING CAREER FOCUS

- **Needed more career exploration.** Wanted more intel on what she could do with writing. Shifted from journalism to public relations focus. She talked about her passion for writing in high school, but would have liked to know more in high school about career paths and what you can do with your passions. More work with guidance about what path you want to take.

- **Didn’t know what she was getting into with her college major.** Chose chemical engineering but didn’t understand what that career would look like. High school could have included more career awareness programs such as talking to people from specific careers and professions. Wish she had more understanding of the field. She liked it but now is going in a different direction for grad school to pursue a career path she didn’t know existed earlier. Wishes she had found direction earlier.

MANAGING TIME DIFFERENTLY

- **More time needed for academics.** Not as much focus on extracurriculars as in high school. Now, needs to spend more time on academics than on activities.

- **Biggest challenge was time management.** Heavily involved in extracurricular activities and sports in high school, needed to adjust to spend more time on academic work.

- **Time management skills were an issue, with college having a more open schedule.** Challenging to learn how to balance between academics (class time and homework time) and extracurricular.

FINDING A ROLE IN THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY

- Had some leadership roles in high school that made the transition easy. Great educators.

- **Skills on networking, how to market yourself and build your own brand.** Howard U., historically black college, is a much different atmosphere than high school. How to find positions of leadership on campus, become a meaningful member of the new community at her college.

- **Challenging to transition to a larger setting.** Coming from a small community where involvement extended beyond academics. In high school was needed for activities and clubs. In college, more competitive to get volunteer positions, stand out, and be a significant presence.

- **Social challenges.** In college, campus culture was social, parties, substances, which she doesn’t do.

3. **What qualities or characteristics do you feel are important for high school graduates to have to help them in life after high school?**

INDEPENDENT, SELF-SUFFICIENT

- **Independence.** You are on your own in college.

- **Self-sufficient and resilient.** Able to push through.

- **Self-motivated, driven.** Confidence, able to network

- **Leadership, determination, motivation.** Things that allow you to make connection and do networking. Take advantage of resources you are given.

- **Leadership.** How to stand up for yourself, be independent.

- **Being able to do things on your own.** Not having to rely on others.

- **You are by yourself, whereas in high school you see a lot of the same faces.** Your schedule in college relies on you – deciding when to study, when to work.

- **Work through challenges**

- **Responsibility.** Taking on your own path

CRITICAL THINKING

- **Critical thinking.** Thinking about things in a different way and coming up with different solutions and adaptability in terms of being flexible and giving it your all.

- **Critical thinking skills.** Important for scientific disciplines, learning
• **Critical thinking.** If you can work through an issue, you can figure out anything.

**COMMUNICATION SKILLS**
• Several participants said communication skills were important.
• **Good communication skills** for communicating with peers, professors, coaches, alumni
• Delegation falls under communication.

**KIND, HELPS OTHERS**
• Kindness.
• **Community oriented.** Able to see the needs of a community, compare to one’s own needs.
• **Empathy.** Thoughts of others

**CREATIVE AND CURIOUS**
• **Curiosity and wanting to learn.** Schools should introduce engaging material that really excites high school learners, even if it strays from AP guidelines.
• **Creativity and balance of academics and personal life.** Important to do your work in a way that could be different than others. “Standing out is crucial in making it to wherever you want to go.”
• Learning to learn.

**OTHER QUALITIES**
• Adaptable. Preparing for every kind of class. Able to learn in every kind of environment.
• **Cultural competency.** Especially coming from Berkshire County. Everyone is going to different parts of the country. Need to understand different ways of life.
• **Self-awareness.** Many resources would be helpful if you take advantage of them. Knowing yourself.
• **Time management.** Learning to balance responsibilities in college.
• Willingness to fail or try new things.
• Financial literacy.

4. In the survey, many students said that having more job or career activities is one thing they would like to change about their high school experience. What kinds of job/career activities do you think high schools should provide?

**JOB EXPERIENCE/EXPOSURE**
• **Job shadowing on Ground Hog Day.** You could pick a career that you thought you wanted to do. Should expand to two or three days a year to explore a greater range of career possibilities. You could reach a conclusion about your career path earlier if you did more exploration.
• BART requires seniors to complete internship (80 hours) related to what you want to study. Did internship at radio station.

**CAREER READINESS ACTIVITIES**
• During senior week, a career readiness literacy day was held at PHS. Covered topics such as budgets, promoting yourself, salary. It was just one day, but would have been helpful as a whole course, an extracurricular activity, or something longer.
• **More intensive career readiness opportunities** would be helpful.
• Went to career fairs including one at MCLA. They did a good job preparing you for career choices. That is how she found out about her college – at this career fair.

**JOB SEARCH SKILLS**
• Classes to help with resume skills, interview skills, talking to employers at career fairs.
• **Interview experience is needed.** Had a lot of interview experience but not everyone did and it would be very beneficial. Add a class in high school.

• **Strategies for Success.** Was a great class at Drury. Skills for interviewing, career options, presentation skills. Drury pushed you out of your comfort zone through this and other programs.

**EXPOSURE TO PROFESSIONALS IN DIFFERENT CAREERS**

• **Berkshire Youth Leadership Program.** Could be scaled to reach more students. They met monthly, professionals from different industries spoke, focus on coming back to Berkshires to work.

• **Have guest speakers come into classrooms.** Would increase exposure to career pathways, niche fields, expose students to different types of career paths. Could have helped her to identify passions sooner.

• **Making connections to people at higher education institutions** could offer more exposure and range of possibility. There isn’t a major university here, but guest speakers would be helpful.

**CONNECT AREAS OF INTEREST TO POSSIBLE CAREERS**

• **More information on what academic program of study leads to.** Link academics to specific jobs. Studied Spanish and Japanese and learned that translator or interpreter were the likely careers, and this is not what she wanted so she switched her major. Would have been helpful to know earlier what her career path could be and what her passions could lead towards.

5. **Another thing that some alumni said they wish they could change about their high school was to have a greater variety of courses. Do you agree or disagree? What could have been offered that wasn't?**

**GOOD AP SELECTION, WOULD HAVE LIKED EVEN MORE**

• Was lucky to have taken AP classes in English Language, English Literature, Calculus, and Chemistry. With my interest in science, would have also liked to take AP Physics and AP Biology. (BART)

**COURSE VARIETY IS BENEFICIAL**

High schools should offer as much course variety as possible (variety in both subject, and intellectual rigor) and should not restrict students from taking courses they want to take. Variety of courses helps students figure out what they want to study in college, or what they might want to do as a career.

**FEWER OPTIONS AT SMALLER SCHOOLS**

• **Not a wide variety of classes.** Hoosac had small graduating classes, led to very small choice of electives. If they offered too many classes, there might only be a few students in each class.

• **Would have liked more vocational/hands-on skills** such as auto tech, changing a tire, wood shop.

• **Greater variety of courses** (BART) would have helped prepare me for college and gauge interest in what I specifically wanted to study in college.

**VIRTUAL CLASSES HELPED TO EXPAND OPTIONS**

• **Was able to do independent studies and virtual high school to take economics and electives (Monument).** Grateful to take economics, used same book in college. Wouldn’t have been enough interest for school to offer economics, but independent study was good option, helped him in college economics.

6. **How well did your high school address the needs of students who are diverse in terms of abilities, learning styles, race, cultural background, LGBTQ, or other factors?**

**DIVERSE LEARNING ABILITIES**

• **Very accommodating of students with disabilities** (BART). Provided them time with educational specialists.
• Students with diverse abilities, specifically students with special needs were well represented and included in the general education functionality of PHS through Best Buddies; specific roles at pep rallies and other social functions; integration of elective classes.
• Students with diverse learning styles had a harder time if they did not have a 504 plan with accommodations. Some teachers recognized the assets of the students and worked accordingly, but this was definitely not a school wide practice.
• **The best kids got pushed hard, those in honors and AP classes.** The rest of kids did not necessarily get that level of attention to be pushed to do their best

**RACE AND CULTURE**
• Students of a minority race and cultural background were included in the learning community, but lack of diverse representation did hinder some students from developing meaningful student-teacher or student-student relationships.
• **Any sort of discrimination was STRICTLY not tolerated,** and there never seemed to be any sort of racial/gender discrimination in the high school by students or faculty (BART). They were also very accommodating of low-income students, as that is/was a majority of the students. Being small school, BART was very easily capable of being accommodating to all of its students.
• **New people, those who speak other languages get segregated.** Hands on group work could force this conversation a bit. Get kids to work together across identity groups to encourage more interaction. Those who are shy and haven’t found their group could get to know peers better by working in groups.
• **Social Justice Club at Lee created a day about different cultures and religions.** It has grown to be a full day. “It really made me appreciate the different aspects of diversity out there. It brought knowledge to me.” MCLA has a diversity day, so being exposed in high school was helpful.

**LGBTQ**
• The LGBTQ community was supported and began to gain some momentum in hosting functions and other club activities.

**GENERAL DIVERSITY**
• **It is really faculty based.** “Each different teacher had their own way of dealing with diversity. I had a couple teachers that were fully embraced in it. Other teachers wouldn’t address it.” Not all teachers supported the diverse perspective, wouldn’t want to open up to teachers that weren’t supportive.

7. **Overall, did your high school prepare you well for the future? Why or why not?**

Overall, participants felt prepared for going to college for a variety of reasons. Some noted feeling less prepared for the future if they had not gone directly into college.

**SUPPORT FROM TEACHERS AND MENTORS**
• The great support system in high school was good preparation for college. Knew how to identify mentors based on high school experience.
• Felt very appreciated in high school by teachers, administrators, and students. “I think an appreciation for where you are at and who you are enables you to do more.”
• Teachers were focused on students’ success, wanted them to do well and explore interests.

**VARIED PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES**
• Great global education programs in high school led to appreciating where you come from.
• Business track was good preparation for studying business in college.
• There were a lot of extracurricular activities; something for everyone to get involved in.
• Besides not advertising the ACTs, they provided my class with a free college class, an internship opportunity, and very good guidance in the college application process.
PREPARATION FOR ADVANCED AND COLLEGE-BOUND STUDENTS WAS GOOD

- BART is a school that is meant for students who know they want to go to college. If college is not the right path for you, BART might not be either.
- Academic rigor was high and there was access to AP classes and content.
- AP courses helped in feeling ready for college, it was easier than expected to do college work.

COULD HAVE USED MORE LIFE SKILLS

- Not sure about preparation for life. Might not have felt prepared if not going straight to college.
- College (not high school) got them ready for life.
- Prepared for college, not as prepared for the real world.
- Lacked exposure to life skills.

SELF-DRIVE

- Readiness for college was more due to his self-drive rather than to anything his high school did.
Student Focus Groups

Section 1: Summary

Overview and Methodology
A survey was conducted in May/June 2020 among high school students attending Berkshire County public schools. The survey’s purpose was to get input from respondents about their high school experience and the knowledge, attributes, and experiences they feel a high school graduate should have to succeed in the future. The survey was conducted as part of the Portrait of a Graduate grant that is being implemented by five Berkshire County high schools (Berkshire Arts and Technology Charter School, Drury, Lee, Pittsfield, and Taconic high schools). Funded by the Barr Foundation, the grant is focused on creating a collective vision of what high school students will know and be able to do by the time they graduate.

As a follow-up to the survey, more in-depth qualitative input was sought from 20 high school students who participated in focus groups. The students were selected from a list of names provided by the three Portrait of a Graduate core facilitators. Mary Nash, the focus group facilitator, was joined by Project Director Jake Eberwein, who introduced the focus groups and helped facilitate the discussions. Project interns Kamea Quetti Hall (graduate of Pittsfield High) and Olivia Carlson (graduate of Drury High) also each attended one focus group, where their role was to facilitate one question and take notes on the discussion. Both were participants in one of the alumni focus groups. Brendan Sheran, core facilitator for the Pittsfield Schools, observed the Pittsfield and Taconic focus groups.

Four focus groups were held, total of 20 participants:
Lee High School, June 9 (3 participants)
Drury High School, June 10 (7 participants)
Taconic High School, June 11 (4 participants)
Pittsfield High School, June 11 (6 participants)

Gender breakdown: Male (11); Female (9)
Racial breakdown: Black (4); Hispanic (1); Asian (1); White (14)
High school grad year: 2020 (5); 2021 (15)

Key themes and results

The following themes emerged from the discussions at the focus groups.

1. **Connections with teachers are a crucial part of the high school experience.** Students form strong relationships with teachers. They are helpful, welcoming, and supportive.
2. **Activities, clubs, and sports are an important part of the high school experience.** Students develop skills and interests through these activities.
3. **Challenging classes help to prepare students for the future and build confidence.** AP and dual enrollment classes are positive experiences. Discussion-based classes build skills that are important for future.
4. **Academic offerings should include course variety beyond core courses.** History, choice of languages, sex education, real world skills are all important parts of academics.
5. **Positive high school experiences lead to specific career and educational interests.** Students’ experiences in specific classes, clubs, internships, and dual enrollment courses have encouraged them to pursue related areas.
6. While many students view their schools as supportive and inclusive, they would like to see more diversity in both student body and teachers/staff. Small schools are not as diverse as larger ones. Students of color want to see themselves reflected in teachers, staff, curriculum, speakers at graduations.

7. Students need to have real world, life skills. Students need to learn about personal finances, getting loans, and life strategies and lessons. They also need career exposure through internships, job shadowing.

8. A variety of personal qualities were identified that will prepare students for the future. Recurring themes were being passionate about what you do, being resilient and willing to persevere, and having a strong work ethic. The qualities identified in the surveys were reinforced.

9. The opportunity to participate in classes and activities at other schools would be welcomed. Students would like to take courses they can’t get at their school, such as different languages, and also activities their school doesn’t offer.

Section 2: Discussion

1. What makes you most proud about your high school and what is one thing you would like to change?

Makes me proud...

TEACHERS
- Teachers are welcoming, encourage students to do their best, there on rough days
- Staff is welcoming (most), care about students both in and outside of class
- Teachers are always there for you, very helpful.
- Teachers are great, they miss them during the summer.
- Teachers are amazing.
- Teachers are supportive and willing to help.
- Very supportive and encouraging teachers.
- Great to get to know teachers when you have them for multiple courses.

SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES
- School is very unified around sports.
- Enjoy competitive sports.
- Lots of activities are available. New classes, clubs. Band, ukulele, guitar.
- Wide variety of extracurriculars.
- Lots of pride in sports, theater/music productions.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY
- School has great social setting, nice to spend time with friends.
- Strong community within a small town.
- Everyone is friends with everyone.
- Strong sense of pride and history.

VARIETY OF CLASSES
- They have a lot of AP classes - great inventory and range.
- Higher level: AP and college prep classes.

LEARNING LIFE SKILLS
- Strategies for Success class (Pittsfield High) – teaches life lessons
Would like to change...

MORE COURSE SELECTION
- Hard to get all the classes you want.
- Can’t take all AP courses due to scheduling conflicts, not offered every year
- If you don’t take courses in a certain order, you might not be able to take them all in four years (ie. science courses)
- Require Strategy for Success class.
- Need more choices for languages. Only Spanish is offered

LESS EMPHASIS ON STANDARDIZED TESTING
- More critical thinking classes, discussion and debate rather than memorization.
- Curriculum is based on standardized exams.

MORE CONSISTENT DISCIPLINE OF STUDENTS
- Rules are not consistent for all students.
- Kids who don’t follow the rules get treated same as those who do.
- Feel discouraged from staying home when sick, little leniency in makeup work.

MORE DIVERSITY
- Smaller schools are not very diverse, predominantly white.
- Small school atmosphere can be a detriment.

LISTEN TO STUDENT SUGGESTIONS
- Administration should listen to student suggestions more
- School asks for feedback, but then does not implement suggested change.

MORE SUPPORT FOR THE ARTS
- More support for the arts rather than just sports, arts may be undervalued

REPLACE BENCHMARKS WITH MIDTERM AND FINAL
- Midterm and final would be better prep for college; students don’t want to try as much with benchmarks.

2. What do you feel are the most important personal qualities you should have by the end of school to be prepared for the future?
- Open minded
- Organizational skills
- Passionate about interests
- Perseverance/work through adversity
- Problem solving
- Resilience
- Respectful
- Self-advocacy
- Time management/how to juggle a lot
- Work ethic – willing to work hard
3. What do you feel are the most important academic skills you should have by the end of school to be prepared for the future?

SPECIFIC SUBJECT AREAS
- History/U.S. Government/Contemporary Studies – important to learn from the past
- Communication skills: writing, debate, presentation
- Math – learning how to deal with money is more relevant than calculus
- Foreign language skills – how to communicate with people different from you
- Sex Education (Girls Inc. course provided more information than school course at PHS)

REAL WORLD EXPERIENCES
- Field trips, job shadowing
- Financial literacy, managing money
- Teachers educate students on life lessons on a personal level
- Strategy class (learning about taxes, credit score)

EXPOSURE TO A VARIETY OF CLASSES
- Taconic does well with providing classes in many fields (law, business, technology programs). If those programs were expanded upon and put into regular curriculum, more students would be better prepared for future and real world.

ACADEMIC HELP IN HIGH SCHOOL
- Help for all students who need it, not just those with IEPs

4. How well does your school address the needs of a diverse student population in terms of race, religion, sexual orientation, learning ability, physical accessibility, ESL, gender identity, etc?

SUPPORTIVE, INCLUSIVE ATMOSPHERE
- Not a lot of people of color, but everyone very respectful of each other
- Good to see people of different cultures, religion and backgrounds.
- Admin handle situations and incidents very effectively.
- Very diverse and inclusive (Taconic).
- Atmosphere is positive (Lee)
- See friends (of all backgrounds) as just people

SOME ISSUES NEED TO BE ADDRESSED
- People say things behind each other’s backs. Need to be more respectful.
- Although school is diverse, they should do more to address microaggressions between students.
- PHS is diverse compared to others in Berkshire County, but not compared to other schools nationally.
- Administration shies away from discussions about race/sexuality/religion

MORE REPRESENTATION NEEDED
- Black student noted he never had a Black teacher; others agreed.
- Upset that there were no black speakers at graduation.
- Latin American history/culture is lacking.
- Sex ed classes address only heterosexual experiences; more attention to LGBTQ+ is needed.

CLUBS
- LGBTQ+ Club at Drury serves as a good support group
• Book Club at Taconic is a mix of students, good to get everyone involved
• Need more cultural clubs – Latinx, Asian, Black, etc.

SPECIAL EDUCATION
• Adults do a great job in special ed room, but they are not very integrated with rest of school
• Proud of special education program at school

5. What high school experiences do you feel have best equipped you for the future?

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS
Dual enrollment and AP classes
AP language classes
Independent work in AP classes; learning how to think on your own
Culinary program at Taconic, did rotations, learned about the vocation, went to competitions
History classes
Independent study with English teacher, looked into history of education, powerful experience

CLASS CONTENT
Hard classes help to build confidence
Discussion based classes
Learned how to think on their own
Group projects in classes help to unify students
Learning about gender/masculinity in English classes
Revising an English essay multiple times to bring grade up – learned about incorporating feedback

CLUBS/PROGRAMS/SPORTS
Being involve in creation of student-run SWHAV club at PHS, Students Who Have a Voice
Student Ambassador program at Drury, supports school improvements
Sports are very impactful, help to build relationships, make connections
Winning Western MA Golf Tournament
French Club, learned about culture without speaking the language

6. What do you hope to be doing after high school? How will your plans connect to future jobs/career?
• Many students have educational or career plans that tie into high school experiences.
  o Student from culinary program wants to be a chef.
  o Debates in English encouraged a student to want to go into law.
  o Another wants to play sports in college.
  o Anatomy and physiology class and field trip to Berkshire Medical Center encouraged a student to become a radiology assistant.
  o Forest ecology class at MCLA led to interest in studying ecology, climate.
  o Drury performing arts management course led student to be interested in event management.
  o Peer mentoring led to interest in social work.
  o Special ed internship led to plans to study special education.
  o Started an environmental club in school, wants to major in environmental science.
  o Helping ESL students made here interested in this field.
• Most plan to go to college, some mentioned leaving the northeast.
• Guidance from teachers and guidance counselors helps to figure out plans.
• Clubs help you to figure out areas of interest (such as PHS SWHAV)
7. If there was an opportunity to take a class, a program, an elective, or a club at another “close by” high school – would you be interested? Why or why not?

- Students all agreed this would be a good option.
- Could eliminate students going to a different school just for one course or activity.
- No orchestra at Taconic, could take this at PHS.
- A Taconic student would like to have access to Personalization Period at PHS, able to take voluntary classes during this time.
- Take a language other than Spanish at another school.
- Life skills classes, transition to adult life.
- There should be more programs, such as Shakespeare and Company’s Fall Festival, that bring schools together
- Open to taking classes in neighboring schools.
- Transportation would be needed.