

Workshop A

School Choice Project:

*Empowering students
in the high school
selection process*

Workshop Objectives

- Scope current efforts within schools, communities, and CBOs that help students navigate the high school selection process
- Explore the school choice process from the student's perspective to better understand their needs and preferences; and
- Inform the creation of student-centered resources and recommendations that can increase the likelihood of them selecting a "best fit" and identify ways to integrate these resources into ongoing efforts within schools and nonprofits.

Workshop Agenda

- Welcome and introductions
- School Choice Project Context
 - SchoolTalk & Higher Achievement
 - Rationale and history of project
- Main deliverables of project
- Student video clips: School choice from student perspective
- Table discussions
- Wrap-up

Presenters:

Christie Lerro,
Higher Achievement

Leila Peterson,
SchoolTalk

SchoolTalk, Inc.



Founded in 2008, SchoolTalk, Inc. is a District of Columbia (DC)-based nonprofit whose mission is to create spaces that promote self-determination and a voice for youth with disabilities and their peers.

SchoolTalk supports the DC education community in collaboratively addressing complex challenges and creating practical solutions for assisting youth of all abilities achieve success. SchoolTalk's programs actively work to improve postsecondary outcomes for youth through both **proactive initiatives** such as youth leadership and mentoring, skill-building, and workforce development; and **direct intervention** to resolve issues in productive ways, such as mediation and restorative justice.

SchoolTalk has three **key program areas: Youth Leadership, Restorative Justice, and Secondary Transition.**



Higher Achievement



- Year-round, four-year out-of-school time program
- Afterschool Academy, Summer Academy, and High School Placement
- Opportunities Matter: mentoring, field trips, events and competitions, college trips
- Unique blend of high expectations and focus on academics with youth-focused social-emotional learning supports

Rationale and History of School Choice Project

- ~33% of all 8th grade applicants select “I am the student” for the question of “Who is completing this application?” on MySchool DC application
- EdForward identified a huge unmet need for better supporting and engaging these students
- Higher Achievement and SchoolTalk partnering with EdForward to better understand the challenges and how to better support student engagement
- Timeline: September – December 2018

New York City Project

- Counselor Toolkit
- Lesson plans
- Video
- Research on youth and parent engagement

What's in my **TOOLKIT?**

Materials for <i>Students</i>	Materials for <i>Parents</i>
Printed Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> My Tool*<input type="checkbox"/> My Checklist*<input type="checkbox"/> My Notes<input type="checkbox"/> My Draft App<input type="checkbox"/> My Lyrics	Printed Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Parent Guide*<input type="checkbox"/> Admissions Methods*
Digital Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> ...	Digital Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Parent Video Available in both English & Spanish

Main Deliverables of School Choice Project from Research Plan

- Exploration of Student Support Needs for completing school choice process, including students with disabilities
- Advisory Group
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Pilot of Student-Centered Questionnaire, Glossary of terms, Mini-video clips

Advisory Group Role

- Group of experts with varying perspectives on the school choice application process in DC
- Able to offer feedback and guidance on projects, specifically:
 - Research plan
 - Data collection
 - Pilot of Student-Centered Questionnaire and Glossary of terms

Data Collection and Analysis

- Focus groups with representative groups of middle and high school students
- School-based stakeholder survey with school counselors and LEA representatives
- Collect quantitative and qualitative data from My School DC/OSSE



Focus Groups

Three Groups:

- Students with disabilities
- Current middle school students (7th and 8th grade)
- Recent high school students (9th and 10th grade)



Focus Group: Current Middle School Students

Outcomes for Focus Group:

- Find out if students are applying to high schools independently.
 - Examine why students are applying independently.
- Determine what students know about the school choice application process.
- Determine what supports students who are independently applying need in order to navigate the school choice process.
 - Find out what resources students use as supports when navigating websites.
- Learn about students' educational goals as they transition to high school and how this plays into their school choice.
- Find out what resources students use as supports when navigating websites.

Focus Group: Students with Disabilities

Outcomes for Focus Group:

- Determine if students are applying to high schools independently.
 - Examine why students are applying independently.
- Establish what students know about the school choice application process.
- Ascertain what supports students with disabilities need in order to navigate the school choice process.
 - Find out what resources students use as supports when navigating websites.
- Learn about students' educational goals as they transition to high school and how this plays into their school choice.
- Verify if students have disability awareness and what supports they need from their school program when applying to high schools.
- Find out what resources students use as supports when navigating websites.

Focus Group: Current High School Students

Outcomes for Focus Group:

- Determine if current high school students applied independently to their high schools.
- Explore why students may have applied independently.
- Discover what students now know about the high school choice application process.
- Find out what supports students would find helpful in the school choice process.
- Solicit recommendations about improving the school choice process.
- Find out what resources students use as supports when navigating websites.

School-based Stakeholder Survey



Data Collection and Analysis: Report of Findings

- Our goal is to obtain more quantitative and qualitative data on students support needs for high school choice.
- Our written report will compile and analyze all data from focus groups and stakeholder surveys.
- Our report will contain data collection and recommendations for the school choice process for students who are independently applying.



Student-Centered Resources

- **School Choice Questionnaire for Students**
 - Modify the School Choice Questionnaire that is currently being used by Higher Achievement to target students completing the school choice application process independently. SchoolTalk will assist in creating a modified version for students with disabilities.
- **Glossary of School Choice Terms**
 - Glossary of school choice terms that is appropriate and targeted to students who are independently completing the school choice process. These will be based on terms that are frequently used on the My School DC website and looking at the FAQs provided and pulling key terms from that section of the website.
- **Mini Video Clips**
 - Mini-video clips of current or former high school students talking about their experiences of picking a high school. These videos will be recorded on iPads and can be used in presentations to students.

Preliminary Focus Group Data





Table Discussions

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- What are the three most important things students need to know when choosing a high school?
- What challenges do students face when they are navigating the high school choice process independently?
- How do you/your school/org. support students:
 - In choosing a high school?
 - After they have been matched to a high school and before the school enrollment deadline?
 - Are there specific supports for students with disabilities?
- How can your institutions and the city leverage and integrate more resources to empower students in the school selection process?

Table Discussion: Report-Outs

What are three common themes?

What are three concrete opportunities/
next steps?

Stay Connected!

Interested in getting involved?

- Fill out an interest form
- Contact Celine Fejeran, Raise DC Deputy Director, at cfejeran@raisedc.org

Got questions?

- Leila Peterson, SchoolTalk – leila.peterson@schooltalkdc.org
- Christie Lerro, Higher Achievement – clerro@higherachievement.org