



**Keeping the Promise** • The Case for Reform in the Pittsburgh Public Schools

Mayor's Commission  
on Public Education

September 2003

## About the Commission

By the summer of 2002, it had become painfully clear that the Pittsburgh Public Schools -- once among the finest school districts in America -- were struggling terribly. Most troubling were the undeniable signs that a majority of its students were underachieving in the classroom, casting dark clouds over their futures. Community concern ran so deep that the Pittsburgh philanthropic community, long-time supporters of public education, took the extraordinary step of withholding funding from the district until an agenda for reform could be developed.

In response to mounting concerns, Mayor Tom Murphy established a Commission on Public Education to open a community dialogue around the conditions of the city's public schools and what is necessary to improve them. The 38 citizens recruited to serve on the Commission brought the diversity, skills, and expertise that an in-depth examination of a large urban public school system demanded. They represented a cross-section of the city: major employers and small business people, educators, legal experts, clergy, and parents from more than a dozen neighborhoods.

Their work began in September 2002. Each Commission member was assigned to one of three committees that examined specific areas of concern with the schools: student performance, finance and governance. They were assisted by an administrative staff, the RAND Corporation, and the Pennsylvania Economy League. For nearly nine months, the Commission, its staff, and consultants reviewed research and best practices related to schools and learning; studied the experiences of other urban districts that have embarked on reform; and interviewed Pittsburgh Board of Education members, administrators, and teachers. To take the pulse of the community, the Commission held a series of meetings throughout the city and listened to the ideas and concerns of parents, senior citizens, neighborhood advocates, business owners, religious organizations, and others.

The Commission's findings and recommendations are summarized in this report. Their recommendations, unanimously approved, are offered as a blueprint for reform in the hope that the city, its citizens and government, will rally to the cause of achieving excellence, equity, and efficiency in the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

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John Chalovich  
Nikki Durnil  
Raymond E. Meyer  
Ronald E. Peters  
Lauren Resnick  
D. Lansing Taylor  
Jerome Taylor

\* through December 2002

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## INTRODUCTION

**The Pittsburgh Public Schools are beset by poor student performance, high costs, high taxes, and a very public record of failed leadership and governance and community indifference** – problems that dim the prospects of more than 35,000 children, tarnish a reputation for excellence that once attracted families to the city, and threaten efforts to ready Pittsburgh for a new century of progress and prosperity.

**These problems demand immediate action.** Fifty-four percent of students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools cannot read at grade level. Even greater numbers are not proficient in math. One in four ninth-graders do not graduate. Significant learning gaps separate African-American students from white students and students whose families are poor from those more affluent. About a half dozen elementary, middle and high schools are in such critical condition that more than 8 out of 10 of their students are unable to read at grade level. Although pockets of excellence can be found and district-wide test scores have shown some improvement, overall achievement levels remain alarmingly low.

**Meanwhile, few districts in the nation are as costly to operate as the Pittsburgh Public Schools.** Our schools do not reflect the considerable investment the public has made in them.

- The district shoulders expensive policies based more on politics than on merit or efficient use of tax dollars, such as spending more than \$10 million a year to keep open many more school buildings than are justified by shrinking enrollments and declining birth rates.
- Its fund balance is so unnecessarily large that freeing only a portion of it could immediately pay for a two-mill property tax reduction and seed a fund to improve student performance in the classroom.

- District payrolls carry one staff position for every seven students – one of the most expensive ratios in Pennsylvania.
- City teachers are the highest paid in the nation, when salaries are adjusted for cost of living, but there is no connection between pay and performance. This well-trained staff would be even more valuable if the most successful and experienced teachers were assigned to low-performing schools, where they are needed most .

For years, the community looked to the Pittsburgh Board of Education for the strong, united leadership these conditions demand.

**Sadly, the elected school board is part of the problem, rather than the solution.** Its ability to effectively govern is eroded by mistrust of one another and of the administration, narrow local interests, and the distractions of politics and race. Exceptionally low turn-out for school board elections leaves the door open to special interest candidates to win seats with relatively few votes, then shape policy to suit their narrow constituencies rather than the best interests of the district as a whole.

**Pittsburgh Deserves Better Schools Today, Not Tomorrow**

**Pittsburgh's children deserve much better.** They deserve improved schools now, not tomorrow when it will be too late for many. **The 21st-century economy requires a greater level of education, not less.** Decent-paying, unskilled jobs are no longer abundant. Students who are not proficient in reading and math today enter the workforce at a serious disadvantage. Even more difficult futures await those who fail to graduate.

The quality of the schools affects not just the children enrolled, but everyone who lives or works in the city. Good schools provide smart employees for our businesses, increase the value of our homes, steer youth toward productive activities and away from crime, and create an educated citizenry. High cost schools with a track record of failure succeed only in driving away families, businesses and jobs.

All of us deserve better from the public schools – and all of us must demand better. This is a city-wide issue of the utmost urgency. The quality of a city’s public schools reflects a city’s commitment to the well-being of its children and to its own future. Excellence will be achieved in the schools only if excellence is demanded by the community. High levels of student achievement will require a concerted city-wide effort with intensive parent and community involvement. From neighborhood celebrations of student recognition to coalitions of engaged and committed parents, this community can and must demand excellence so that all of our schools become high performers and all of our children become high achievers.

### Other Cities Find The Courage To Reform Their Schools

Pittsburgh does not suffer these troubles alone. Low achievement and inequities among students and schools are concerns common among urban districts. So are school boards crippled by mistrust, stubborn feuding, and political division.

**The good news is that such problems are not impossible to solve.**

Education reform is spreading across the nation. Urban districts such as Boston, Cleveland, Chicago, and Seattle have found the courage to confront their shortcomings and the resolve to travel the hard road of reform and have arrested decline and reversed downward trends.

With such goals in mind, the Mayor’s Commission On Public Education in September 2002 began an exhaustive examination of student performance, governance, and finance in the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

### Fundamental Change Will Work; Quick Fixes Will Not

The Commission’s nine-month investigation led to one indisputable conclusion: **Bold solutions and fundamental change are necessary to achieve excellence** in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, offer all students the opportunity of an enriching education, and brighten the

city's future. Staying the current course, making short term financial fixes or making only changes that can be undone in the next election simply will not do. The problems are systemic.

We know what high-performing school districts look like. Attention is riveted on improving student performance. Staff and finances are used only in ways that best achieve that objective. Administrators and teachers are charged with providing effective instruction and are given full support. A high level of student performance is expected and the school board and administration are held accountable for achieving it. Family involvement and investment in their children's education is directly associated with high achievement. A community's expectation of excellence is critical to supporting schools, teachers, and student efforts that bring about greater levels of accomplishment. In short, a community that demands excellence is a prerequisite for change.

### **An Appointed School Board Is The Key To Success**

After careful study, the Commission concluded that **Pittsburgh will not have a high-performance school district without fundamental, structural change in the way the public schools are governed.**

The current elected-board governance structure contributes to high costs, high taxes, and the neglect of poor student performance and widespread inequity. The board majority, for example, has changed three times over the last seven years. As long as board members are elected by geographic areas – and by small numbers of voters concerned mostly about narrow issues – a leadership crisis will likely resurface and, again, undermine the schools.

Pittsburgh and its children deserve a Board of Education steeped in expertise and committed to a high standard of academic performance and sound management of finances and facilities – a board that reflects the city's racial, geographic, and economic diversity,

and places the need to improve the performance of all students above all else.

**The Commission is convinced that improving student performance and lowering taxes is possible – but only with the unified sense of purpose, discipline, and consistency over many years that only a carefully-appointed Board of Education can provide.**

The Commission recommends that such a board be appointed by the Mayor. To ensure balance and quality, members of the new board should be chosen from a pool of candidates selected by a diverse nominating committee. Mayor-appointed school boards have proven successful in other large cities where citizens have fought to overcome failed leadership that stood in the way of turning declining schools around.

#### **Tax Reductions Today And Tomorrow Are Possible**

**Taxes should be reduced even before a mayor-appointed board is seated.** Funds are available to do so. Making long-overdue fiscal changes will provide additional opportunities to reduce taxes, as well as opportunities to fund initiatives to improve academic achievement.

**The Commission recommends reducing property taxes by two mills immediately and creating a fund for improving student performance.** Lowering the district's unnecessarily large fund balance to a reasonable level will allow the Pittsburgh Public Schools to do both.

In the coming years, **a mayor-appointed Board of Education with the expertise and the will to close unneeded schools and reduce staff could save the district more than \$10 million a year**, which could be used to reduce taxes and fund additional educational initiatives. To ensure such savings, it is recommended that an **independent Schools Consolidation Commission** be created with the expertise to

assess district properties and the will to trim excess capacity. The Mayor's Commission estimates that in light of an expected decline in enrollment, the Board could cut the property tax levy nearly in half over the next decade, while maintaining current pupil-teacher ratios and investing \$8.5 million a year in new instructional initiatives.

The Mayor's Commission offers two additional recommendations it considers essential to improving the schools now and in years to come:

- District leadership should send a clear, unified message of their dedication to improving student performance – one that sets high expectations for all students, promises a new era of openness, welcomes parent and community participation, and holds the board and administration accountable for achieving the goals set.
- An independent alliance for school improvement should be recruited to monitor the progress of reform, regularly report back to the public, and engage a range of community partners in efforts to improve the educational outcomes of students.

All of the findings and recommendations of the Mayor's Commission on Public Education are reported in detail in the following pages. They are the product of thorough research and are offered as **a blueprint for the fundamental reform** the Commission is convinced is necessary to move the Pittsburgh Public Schools forward, united and dedicated to the mission of becoming not just a good urban school district, but a model of excellence and equity in public education.



# Mission, Priorities and Process

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# Mission, Priorities and Process

## of The Mayor's Commission On Public Education

By the summer of 2002, it had become painfully clear the Pittsburgh Public Schools – once among the finest school districts in America, urban or otherwise – were struggling terribly. Most troubling were the undeniable signs that a majority of its students were underachieving in the classroom. Community concern ran so deep that the Pittsburgh philanthropic community, a long-time supporter of public education, took the extraordinary step of withholding funding from the district until an agenda for reform could be developed.

In response to mounting concerns, Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy established a Commission on Public Education to open a community dialogue around the conditions of the city's public schools and what is necessary to improve them. Hundreds of letters, telephone calls, and e-mail messages were received expressing enthusiasm for the Mayor's undertaking and offering assistance. The 38 citizens recruited to serve on the Commission brought the diversity, skills, and expertise that an in-depth examination of a large urban public school system demanded. They represented a cross-section of the city: major employers and small business people, educators, legal experts, clergy, and parents from 17 neighborhoods.

Their mission was to thoroughly and objectively investigate the condition of the Pittsburgh Public Schools, report their findings to the public, and offer an agenda for far-reaching reform that will improve the educational outcomes of the city's public school children and allow taxpayers to get the most out of their considerable investment in public education.

### Getting Down To Work

Their work began in September 2002. For more than nine months, they examined three general areas of concern in the Pittsburgh Public Schools: academic performance of students, financial conditions, and governance and leadership. They were assisted in their work by an administrative staff and two highly respected organizations, the RAND Corporation and the Pennsylvania Economy League. Together the Commission, staff, and consultants reviewed research and best practices related to schools and learning; studied the experiences of other urban districts that have embarked on reform; and interviewed Pittsburgh Board of Education members, administrators, and teachers.

In addition, the Commission held a series of public meetings throughout the city in order to better take the pulse of the community. These meetings enabled the Commission to hear the ideas and concerns of parents, senior citizens, neighborhood advocates, business owners, religious organizations, and others.

### Dividing The Work

To take full advantage of the talents offered by the range of people who volunteered, the Commission was structured into the three working committees, each focused on one of the three general areas of concern: the Governance and Leadership Committee; Student Performance, Standards and Accountability Committee; and the School Funding and Financial Management Committee.

Each committee deliberated independently, while sharing information and staff with the Commission as a whole. While the Commission recognized that the issues addressed by each committee are intertwined, it concluded that in-depth discussion and analysis would be more focused if the issues were investigated within each committee and the outcomes of their work shared later. Each committee reviewed the latest and most reliable research and often conducted their own interviews with experts in the issues of study, which were then distilled and made available to the Committee as a whole. (Please refer to the Bibliography on page 73 in the Appendix.)

More details of the work of each committee follows.

## Leadership and Governance Committee

No single element of reform is more critical to improving the Pittsburgh Public Schools – or as potentially controversial – than the Commission’s recommendation to adopt a new, more responsive model of governance: a school board whose members are appointed by the Mayor from a diverse pool of qualified candidates.

The implications of this profound, yet essential, step were not lost on the Governance and Leadership Committee, which drafted the recommendation based on its exhaustive examination of issues related to school governance, the conditions within the Pittsburgh Public Schools, and the experiences of other public school districts in major U.S. cities.

### Interviews

During its investigation, the Leadership and Governance Committee developed a set of criteria for a model school governance structure – including an outline for how responsibilities should be divided between the board and superintendent – and assessed the governance roles, functions, structure, and operations found in the Pittsburgh Public Schools against the criteria. Legal issues were studied. The committee also interviewed school officials past and present, in addition to a number of experts in education and school district governance. **Those interviewed included:**

- **Ron Cowell**, the former chairman of the state House Education Committee and the president of the Education Policy and Leadership Center in Harrisburg. Cowell provided the committee with insights into the legal framework of education at the state level.
- **The executive directors of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association and the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators.** Both supported essentially the same vision of appropriate division of responsibilities for the board and superintendent, arguing that the superintendent should be vested with authority like that of a corporate chief executive officer.
- **Richard Wallace**, the superintendent of the Pittsburgh Public Schools in the 1980s, when the district was widely viewed as a key community asset, both here and nationally; **Helen Faison**, the highly-respected interim superintendent of the city schools from 1999 to 2000; and **David Brownlee**, whose years on the Pittsburgh Board of Education include periods when members were appointed to the

- board and periods when members were elected to sit on the school board.
- The current **Pittsburgh Public Schools Superintendent, John Thompson**, and **Jean Fink**, who, at the time, was president of the Pittsburgh Board of Education. In these discussions, both conceptually supported a division of duties that gives the school board policymaking and fiscal oversight responsibilities, while vesting in the superintendent the responsibilities of implementing policy and managing the day-to-day business of the district. In practice, however, the board has extended its authority by broadly defining fiscal oversight to include most school business.
- Members of the **Pittsburgh Board of Education** who were in office during the period from September 2002 to May 2003. A subcommittee met with every school board member individually. Board members tended to discuss fiscal matters and their responsibilities to those who elected them and spent little time discussing the academic achievement of students in the city's public schools.
- **Paul Hill**, faculty member of the University of Washington and author of the highly regarded works on best governance practices for school districts.
- **Jason Snipes and Robert J. Ivry** from the Manpower Research and Development Corporation who studied high-performing school districts.
- **Superintendents** from public school districts in **St. Paul, Minnesota, and Springfield, Massachusetts**. The full Commission met with these officials, who described how they worked with their districts from political, demographic, and educational perspectives, and how they succeeded in engaging their communities in creating strategic plans and cultures of achievement that benefit their schools.

The Governance and Leadership Committee also considered a large body of literature on school governance. The reports that helped inform the committee included: "The Future of Public Education in Pennsylvania," a recent report by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association; a recent report for the Education Commission on Roles and Responsibilities of School Boards and Superintendents; Boards That Make A Difference, by John Carver, which helped lay the foundation of the governance model used today by many school boards; two reports from the Institute for Educational Leadership, *Restructuring School District Leadership* and *Urban School Leadership: Different in Kind and Degree*; and "Thinking Differently: Recommendations for 21st Century School Board/Superintendent Leadership, Governance and Teamwork for High Student Achievement," a report published by the Educational Research Service. Additional readings are listed in the Bibliography on page 73 in the Appendix.

### Defining Principles For Change

The Leadership and Governance Committee's research led it to conclude that for all students of the Pittsburgh Public Schools to receive the benefits of a high-quality public school system, the following qualities are essential.

- The efforts of board members and the superintendent must be visibly and consistently directed toward making the district one of the most respected public school systems in the U.S. For that to be realized, it is critical that school leadership value and nurture both the academic development and the broader growth of all students and that such considerations rank high on every relevant measure of educational performance.

- The work of school board members and the superintendent must be characterized by professionalism, effective communications, and mutual respect.
- In working toward the common mission of nurturing the development of the city's public school students, the school board and the superintendent must recognize and respect a division of responsibilities that affords the board policymaking and fiscal oversight duties, while relinquishing authority to allow the superintendent to effectively operate as the school district's chief executive officer.
- Because the progress of the district and city are so intertwined, the efforts of the district must be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the larger community.

In determining what governance structure would best advance these qualities, the committee studied a wide range of alternatives, including:

- a board elected by district; a board elected at large;
- an appointed board;
- a hybrid board with some members elected at large and others elected by district;
- and a hybrid board in which some members are elected and others are appointed.

The committee also considered eliminating the board altogether and allowing the public schools to function in ways similar to a city agency. These options were measured against a series of questions that included the following:

- Would the structure heighten the focus on student performance?
- Would the structure lead to more attention being paid to district-wide needs, rather than narrower neighborhood concerns?
- Would the structure increase the likelihood of the district benefiting from a true leadership team, with the board and superintendent working together toward a common mission of excellence, equity, and efficiency in the public schools?
- How would the structure affect minority representation, geographic representation and parent representation on the board itself and within the schools?
- How would the structure affect the district's ability to attract the very best school board members and superintendents?
- Would the structure convey the message that urgent action is needed if Pittsburgh is to realize the benefits of a high-quality public school system.

After much deliberation, the committee concluded that a school board appointed by the mayor from a group given to him by a separate nominating committee would best serve the interests of the all of the city's public school student and of the community as a whole.

## School Funding and Financial Management Committee

The School Funding and Financial Management Committee did a comprehensive study of finances in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, paying particular attention to school revenues, expenditures, and business practices.

The committee studied a range of data to arrive at its reported findings and inform its recommendations for improved financial management and tax reductions. Among the data studied were:

- School district demographics.
- Enrollment trends.
- Revenue and expenditure trends and future projections.
- Resource allocations and expenditures within the district.
- Overall costs and per-pupil costs.
- Potential cost drivers, including staffing levels, staff salaries and benefits, class sizes, capital projects and debt, overhead costs, and percentages of students from low-income families.

The committee also considered several other issues, including reimbursements for charter schools, prospects for state and federal legislation, and opportunities for leading the district into long-term fiscal health.

The committee was supported by its chief consultant, the Pennsylvania Economy League. The full committee convened eight times to review financial information and to develop recommendations. The committee also interviewed the Pittsburgh Public schools staff and officials, including the district's financial adviser, members of the fiscal staff, and the chair of the school board's business and finance committee.

In addition, the committee gathered information on how urban public school districts in Pennsylvania and through the U.S. spend their money to advance the cause of providing a high-quality education for all public school children. The committee also compared the costs of Pittsburgh's public schools with other districts and reviewed best financial practices from a national standards perspective. Specific sources used by the School Funding and Financial Management Committee can be found in the Appendix starting on page 104.

## Student Performance, Standards and Accountability Committee

The Student Performance, Standards and Accountability Committee reviewed national literature and the experience of other U.S. school districts to determine the characteristics of high-performing school systems.

The committee concluded that five broad principles are essential to realizing the vision of a high-performing district:

- **Focus:** All district activities should be focused on a common objective: improved student achievement to attain high levels of proficiency for all students.
- **Accountability:** Board members as well as staff at district and school levels should be clearly and specifically responsible for promoting effective instruction and student achievement, and should be given the authority to meet that responsibility.
- **Capacity:** The district should promote the capacity of its staff to meet the expectations of the accountability/authority systems in improving student achievement.
- **Efficiency:** The district should allocate financial and human resources in ways that promote student achievement while keeping costs and taxes at reasonable levels.
- **Community:** Families and community organizations should take responsibility for ensuring that children are ready to learn when they arrive in school, and the district should fully engage families and the community in support of its educational mission.

The committee's recommendations follow from these principles and were informed by intensive inquiries into the current operations of the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Commission members and staff conducted a number of interviews with school officials and experts in education. Commission staff also listened to the insights and experiences of other community members who attended the public forums held by the Commission throughout the city.

### Interviews

The Student Performance, Accountability and Standards Committee interviewed the following school officials and education experts as part of its research.

- The committee met with the **superintendent of the Quaker Valley School District** and the former **superintendents of the Woodland Hills and South Side Beaver districts**. Each agreed that the stability of leadership in a district is critical to success; the superintendent must emerge as a leader capable of working with the school board; districts should focus on building a team that promotes trust and support among teachers and principals; and that the district must embrace a common focus. In all three districts, the community had a voice in creating the vision for the schools. And data from the vision statements were used regularly in assessing both teachers and students.
- The committee met with current **principals from the Woodland Hills and South Side Beaver school districts** and **former principals from the Pittsburgh Public Schools**. These interviews helped to define the roles of effective principals and superintendents.

- The committee also met with **Pittsburgh Public Schools Superintendent Thompson, Denise Yates, and Diane Briars**, the district's directors of Literacy and Prime Plus, respectively. They presented their findings in support of the Literacy Plus and Everyday and Connected Math programs. They also addressed recent improvements in reading and math scores and shared their future plans.
- Representatives of the **Rand Corporation** presented the findings of their analysis of performance statistics for the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Data on student performance are reported in the Findings section of this report..
- Rand also conducted a series of interviews of central office staff and principals and teachers in 11 representative schools to understand how the district operates and to determine the extent to which the district is organized for achievement. Information from these interviews informs the discussion in both the Findings and Recommendations sections of the report.

## Pittsburgh Citizens Lend Their Insight

The Commission staff actively solicited the voice of the Pittsburgh community, holding public meetings throughout the city with more than 30 groups representing diverse cultures, neighborhoods, interests, and backgrounds.

Several themes emerged from these discussions. Citizens consistently raised the following issues.

- **Keeping Order in the Classroom:** Safety and discipline emerged as a major concern and one that tends to discourage parents from enrolling their children in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. The general feeling expressed was that discipline problems affect both teachers and students, hindering teachers from effectively doing their jobs and distracting students from learning. Citizens reported that teachers have to attend to disruptive children, robbing the rest of the class of valuable learning time.
- **Expecting more from the Middle Schools:** A common sentiment expressed was that middle schools are where deeper problems involving students begin. Many citizens at the public meetings complained that expectations are lowered for students and the quality of education declines in middle school. Most expressed a high level of confidence in their neighborhood elementary schools, but were less convinced of the quality of education in the district's middle and high schools.
- **Demanding Quality in All Schools:** Some said, "All schools should be magnets." Others said, "No schools should be magnets." On one hand, citizens appeared divided on the issue of magnet schools. The Commission, however, concluded that both sides were expressing a common desire – that all schools, regardless of grade level or size or neighborhood, should offer students a high-quality education and that discrepancies of quality between schools is unacceptable.
- **Increasing Community Involvement:** Most believed that parent involvement and the involvement of the larger community are critical to the success of the public schools, and that the district does not make sufficient efforts to involve parents and the community.
- **Raising Expectations for Student Achievement:** Citizens said repeatedly that they believed high academic achievement should be the focus of the school board, superintendent, administration, and community. They were concerned that expectations for students are low in the classroom (i.e. tracking, no homework), as well as in the community. They also felt too many in the city are content with favorable comparisons with other urban districts and Pittsburgh's rank as one of "the best of the worst." They felt that community standards regarding education need to be set higher. Wide support was expressed for students learning "basic skills" – math and reading – and for not moving students to a higher grade level unless they demonstrate proficiency in those subjects. Another strongly-held belief was that any student graduating from the public schools should possess the skills necessary to succeed in the workforce.
- **Developing the Expertise of the School Board:** Many of those who attended public forums were highly critical of the elected school board. There was broad agreement that school board members should possess a level of expertise, and that the board should consider what is in the best interest of the district as a whole, not simply their narrow constituencies.

· **Disseminating the Good News:** Another common complaint was that the Pittsburgh Public Schools, while enjoying a number of successes, suffers from a media image focused on the negative and infrequently conveying the positive.

The website of the Mayor's Commission on Public Education helped reach an even wider audience and engage the public in the Commission's efforts to examine the city's public schools with the intention of drafting an agenda for reform to improve them. The website ([www.educationcommission.org](http://www.educationcommission.org)) posted regular surveys seeking responses to questions that were raised in committee discussions and public meetings. (The surveys are included in the Appendix on page 90.) It continues to post information about the Pittsburgh Public Schools, links to best practices and research, and Commission documents, including this report and the accompanying executive summary.

# Findings

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# Findings

A news report on the latest conflict to divide the Board of Education. Another round of bleak standardized test scores. A tax bill that is high by any measure. The symptoms of dysfunction within the Pittsburgh Public Schools are increasingly apparent.

For nine months, the Mayor's Commission on Public Education investigated the school district, its governance structure and current leadership, financial condition, and performance of its students. Serious shortcomings were found at every turn – complex, troubling problems deeply rooted within the school system. Some have been matters of public debate. Others are less known. Most are related in some way to the failings of a school district leadership and governance that has lacked the unity, expertise, vision, and political will necessary to solve them, and a community that has been disengaged and has not held that structure accountable.

The findings of the Commission are reported in the following section. While many document problems found in the classroom and board room, not all of the news is bad. Perhaps the most hopeful is that other communities with similarly dysfunctional public school systems have rallied around a flag of reform, demanded improvement, worked hard and are achieving it.

# Student Performance

## In The Pittsburgh Public Schools

In the 21st Century economy, a good education is not a luxury. It is a necessity. In the Pittsburgh Public Schools, there are reasons for alarm. District-wide levels of student performance in reading and math fall below state standards, attendance is disappointing, and graduation rates are low.

When compared with other large and troubled urban districts, Pittsburgh's public schools tend to fare well. And in recent years, reading and math achievement scores have risen at all grade levels. But isolated excellence and small improvements at the margins are not enough. And the complacent view that "at least we're not as bad as other big city systems," is no longer acceptable. Excellence should be expected of all city schools.

There is reason for hope. Some promising instructional initiatives are under way and the public schools are staffed by a strong, experienced corps of teachers. The city is also blessed with a wide range of community resources that can aid the schools in their educational mission. An efficient, high-performing public school system is within reach. But it will require a coordinated, community-wide effort that focuses the efforts of teachers, administrators, the school board, parents, and the larger community on promoting achievement.

**Measured against the absolute standard of proficiency – Do students have the reading and math skills they need to succeed? – achievement levels in Pittsburgh are alarmingly low.**

Pittsburgh's elementary and middle schools perform somewhat better than those of other urban districts with high proportions of low-income and minority students. But the city's public schools are far from good enough when measured on a broader scale.

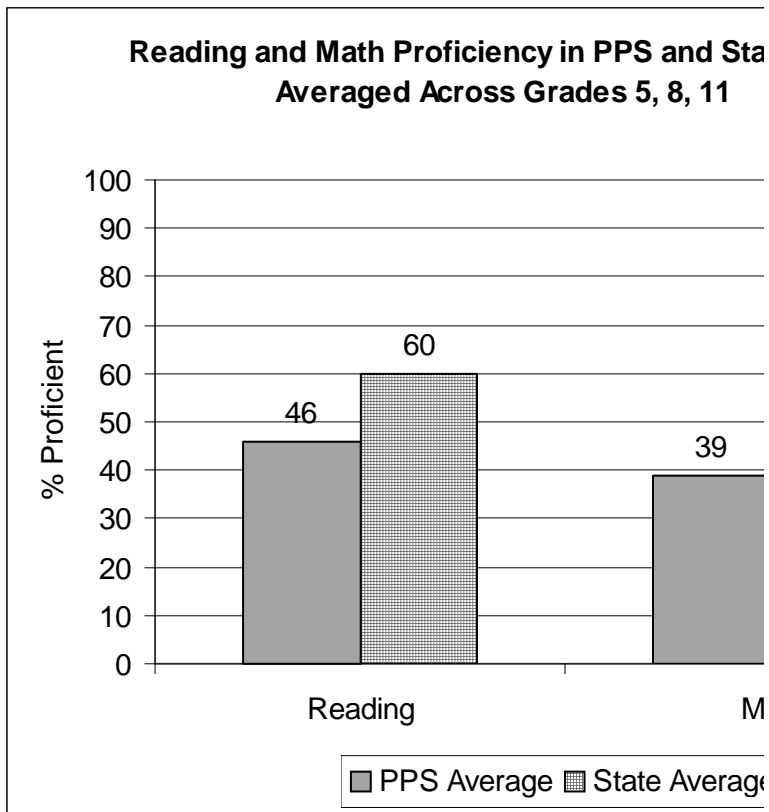
An analysis of achievement data from the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) indicates that Pittsburgh's average test scores in elementary and middle schools, in both reading and math, are higher than scores in schools that serve similar student populations elsewhere in the state.<sup>1</sup> In high school, Pittsburgh's scores are comparable to those of schools serving similar populations.

Overall, however, the scores of the city's public school students fall far below state averages. The PSSA scores suggest that a majority of Pittsburgh Public School students at all grade levels are cannot read and do math at levels expected for students in their grades. Specifically, 2003 PSSA data from grades 5, 8, and 11 indicate that:

- Only 46% of Pittsburgh Public School students can read at grade level.
- Only 39% of Pittsburgh Public School students can do math at grade level.

Proficiency rates in the Pittsburgh Public Schools are compared to average proficiency rates across the state in Figure 1, on the next page.

Figure 1



**Wide achievement gaps exist between students of different races, income levels and schools.**

The academic performance of students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools is even more troubling when examined by race and family income.

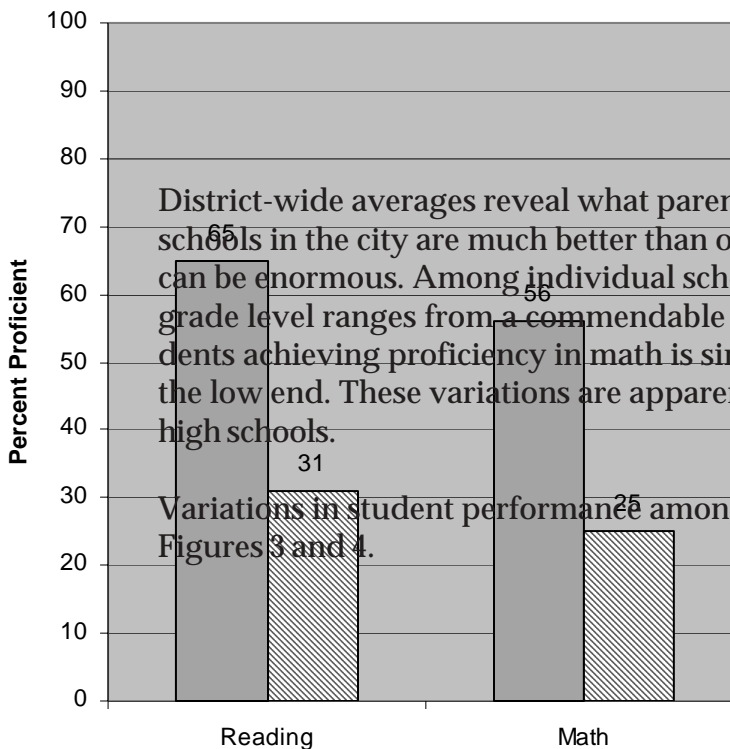
- Only 34% of low-income students in Pittsburgh can read at grade level and only 29% are proficient in math. Low income students include those whose family incomes fall below poverty levels, as well as students whose family incomes are above poverty level, but low enough to qualify them for the federal free and reduced priced lunch program. About 60% of Pittsburgh public school students were from low-income families in 2001-2002.
- The learning gap among races is even wider. Only 31% of African-American students can read at grade level (compared with 65% of white students) and only 25% are proficient in math (compared with 56% of white students). The proportion of black students achieving proficiency is less than half the proportion of white students achieving proficiency.

The district's data confirm that race matters in Pittsburgh: African-American students have lower scores than white students even after accounting for the effects of poverty and single parenting. The racial gaps seen in math and reading scores at all grade levels are illustrated

in Figure 2.

Figure 2

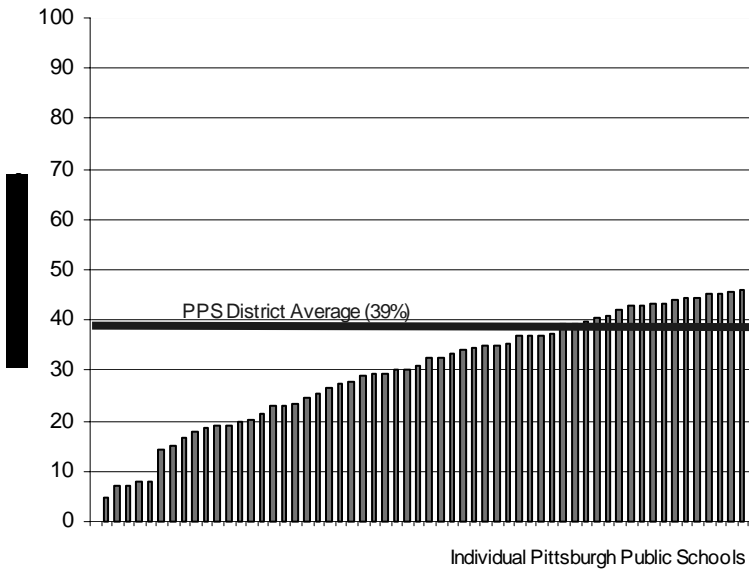
**Proficiency Rates by Race in Pittsburgh**  
Averaged Across Grades 5, 8, 11



District-wide averages reveal what parents around the city already know: Some public schools in the city are much better than others. And the learning gaps among their students can be enormous. Among individual schools, the proportion of students who can read at grade level ranges from a commendable 91% to a deplorable 3%. The proportion of students achieving proficiency in math is similarly varied, from 78% on the high end to zero on the low end. These variations are apparent among elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools.

Variations in student performance among individual schools in the district are charted in Figures 3 and 4.

**Figure 4: Math Proficiency in PPS by School**



**Low student performance pushes the Pittsburgh Public Schools to the brink of failure as defined by state and federal law and could result in diminished local control over school matters and the imposition of other sanctions.**

Proficiency in reading and mathematics is required by law, and districts and schools whose students fail to meet prescribed standards risk serious sanctions. The federal No Child Left Behind act (NCLB) requires all states, school districts, and schools to raise all of their students – 100% – to prescribed reading and math proficiency levels by 2014 in a series of graduated steps. In response to the federal law, Pennsylvania enacted Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards for all schools in the state.

AYP standards set low thresholds for 2003: at least 35% of students in all schools and districts must be proficient in math and 45% in reading. The targets will be raised in subsequent years until 100% proficiency is achieved.<sup>2</sup> Despite the low threshold set for this year, Pittsburgh's public schools have reason to be concern. Only a third of Pittsburgh's schools met all AYP targets in spring 2003, according to the initial lists received by the state (pending appeals by the district to move more schools off the low-performing lists).

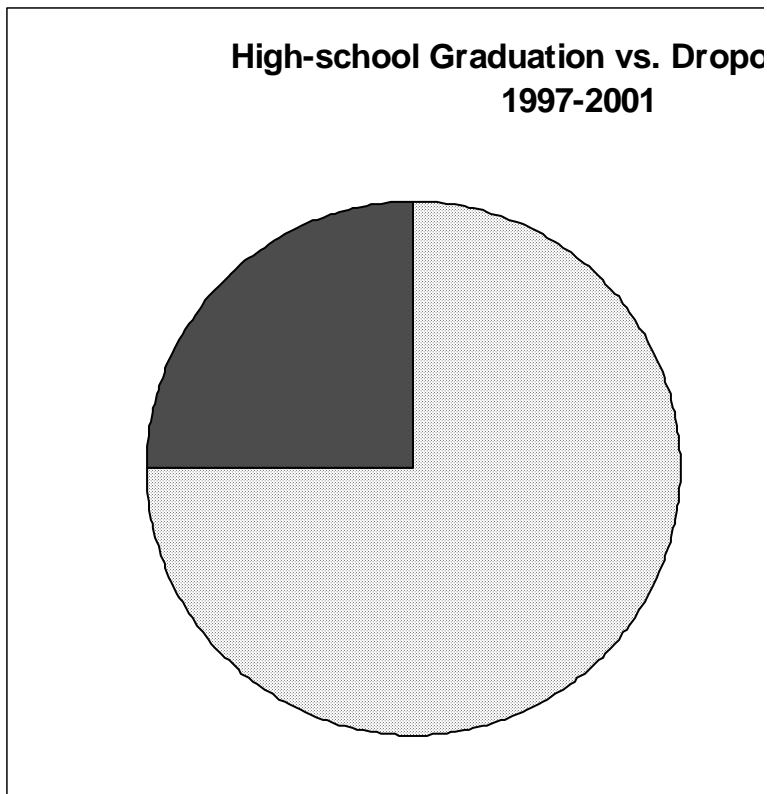
In one-third of the district's schools, the failure to meet AYP targets in 2003 has put them on a state warning list (pending appeals). Another third of the district's schools failed to meet AYP targets in both 2002 and 2003 (also pending appeals). As a result, they are targeted for "school improvement," and all of their students must be given options to transfer to higher-achieving schools, at the district's expense. Schools that continue to fail to meet AYP targets in future years face more serious sanctions, including possible replacement of staff and state takeover. The problem is especially acute at the high-school level. Only one high school in the district avoided the state warning list (pending appeals).

The district as a whole is also held accountable. District-wide, average proficiency levels in 2003 were just above the state's AYP standard, but the district failed to achieve AYP for its African-American and low-income students, which may place the district on the state warning list of low-performing districts.<sup>3</sup> If proficiency levels for African-American and low-income students do not improve in future years, the entire district is at risk of sanctions. Students will be permitted to transfer to schools outside the district and the state will have the authority to withhold funds, replace staff, establish new curricula, take over some or all of the district's schools, or even abolish or restructure the district.

**Graduation rates are low, particularly among African-American students, and attendance levels throughout the district are disappointing.**

Test scores provide only one measure of student performance. Unfortunately, graduation rates among students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools are also disappointing. An analysis of enrollment figures over a four-year period suggests that one-fourth of ninth-graders drop out before graduating (see Figure 5). Data were not available to disaggregate graduation rates, but current enrollment figures strongly suggest that the drop-out rate among African-American students is substantially higher than one-in-four. Pennsylvania's accountability plan under NCLB expects districts to improve their graduation rates until they reach 95%.

Figure 5



Attendance is an essential prerequisite to achievement. Moreover, attendance is monitored under NCLB: Pennsylvania's accountability plan under NCLB expects continued improvement in attendance in grades K-8 until they achieve 95% attendance rates. In Pittsburgh, attendance rates are improving, but have not reached the 95% standard. Attendance is particularly disappointing at the high school level, where the district-wide attendance rate in 2002-03 was only 85%. In other words, on a typical day, 15% of Pittsburgh public high school students are absent from class.

Attendance rates at all grade levels in the Pittsburgh Public Schools are illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6

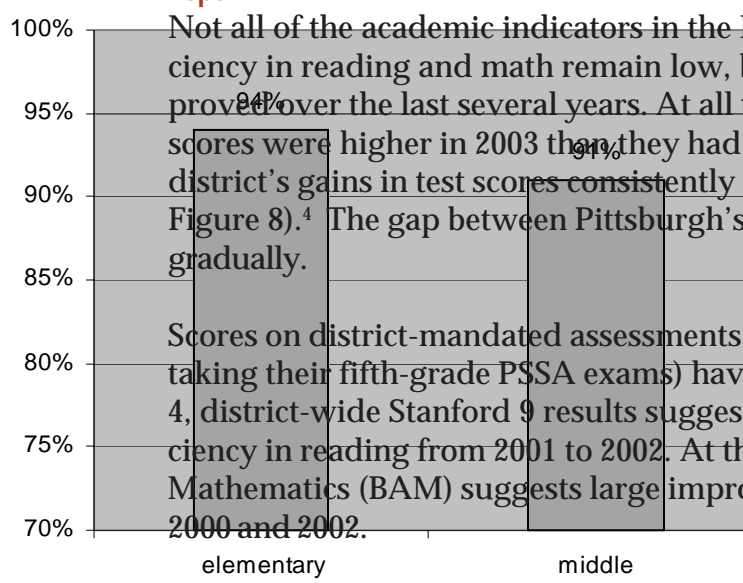
**Attendance Rates in PPS, 2002**

Although scores are still low, recent trends in Pittsburgh Public Schools test scores offer reason for hope.

Not all of the academic indicators in the Pittsburgh Public Schools are grim. Student proficiency in reading and math remain low, but the district's overall PSSA scores have improved over the last several years. At all tested grade levels, average reading and math scores were higher in 2003 than they had been over the preceding six years. In fact, the district's gains in test scores consistently outpaced those of the state (see Figure 7 and Figure 8).<sup>4</sup> The gap between Pittsburgh's scores and state averages has been narrowing, if gradually.

Scores on district-mandated assessments in early elementary grades (prior to students taking their fifth-grade PSSA exams) have also shown gains in the recent past. In grades 1-4, district-wide Stanford 9 results suggest an average of 7% more students achieved proficiency in reading from 2001 to 2002. At the same time, the district's Balanced Assessment in Mathematics (BAM) suggests large improvements in proficiency in grades 1-3 between 2000 and 2002.

If these results prove to be valid indicators, the Pittsburgh Public Schools should see substantial increases in proficiency rates on the fifth-grade PSSA exams over the next two years.



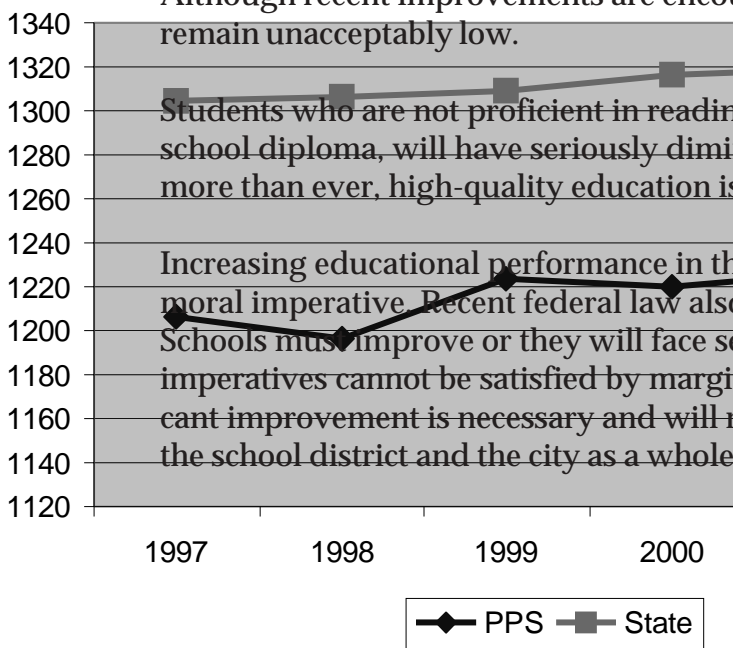


**Figure 8: PSSA Math Scores, 1997-2000  
Averaged Across Grades**

Although recent improvements are encouraging, current levels of student performance remain unacceptably low.

Students who are not proficient in reading and math, and those who fail to earn a high school diploma, will have seriously diminished prospects for the rest of their lives. Today more than ever, high-quality education is essential to opening the door of opportunity.

Increasing educational performance in the public schools is a matter of social justice – a moral imperative. Recent federal law also makes it a legal imperative: the Pittsburgh Public Schools must improve or they will face serious and costly sanctions. The moral and legal imperatives cannot be satisfied by marginal improvements in student performance. Significant improvement is necessary and will require an intense and focused effort on the part of the school district and the city as a whole.



## Footnotes

1. More specifically, a regression analysis examined school-level average PSSA scores in math and reading in 2001 for every public school in the state, controlling for poverty, race, special education status, urbanicity, and English-language learner status. Math and reading tests were given in grades 5, 8, and 11 (grade 3 was added in 2003).
2. Reaching 100% proficiency on the PSSA may be particularly problematic because the test was initially designed to distinguish among students rather than to measure proficiency. Schools with high levels of proficiency may therefore experience “ceiling effects” that make it hard to get to 100%. At the low levels of proficiency that are currently evident in Pittsburgh, however, ceiling effects are not relevant.
3. The state has not yet released its AYP lists for districts, and it is not clear whether Pittsburgh may be able to stay off the list by taking advantage of the law’s “safe harbor” provision.
4. When this report went to press, 2003 average scaled scores for the district and the state were not yet available from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, so Figure 7 and Figure 8 include scores only through 2002. But the data on proficiency levels indicate that the district made further gains on the state in 2003, which will be reflected when the average scaled scores are released.



# The Financial Condition

## of The Pittsburgh Public Schools

Pittsburgh's public schools are rich in resources, but lacking in leadership and focus. The financial consequence of such characteristics is a financially-stable, but high-cost school district that imposes an unnecessarily-high tax burden on those living within its boundaries.

The Pittsburgh Public Schools keep open too many schools and maintain a higher than necessary staff level in light of declining enrollment. The district also continues to accumulate an excessive fund balance. These findings not only stand as strong evidence that district taxpayers are paying too much, but also point to a lack of a coherent, policy-driven discipline, particularly among elected school board members who, for example, acknowledge the high cost of excess building capacity, but fail to act on a remedy that could save millions of dollars a year.

Add poor district-wide standardized test scores and other academic concerns and it is clear: Pittsburgh taxpayers are not getting a sufficient return on their investment.

The good news is that financial solutions are available that would allow the district to reduce property taxes and seed initiatives to improve academic achievement now and for several years to come – as long as district leadership has the will to embrace such solutions.

**The Pittsburgh Public Schools are very expensive to operate – a high cost school district by any reasonable measure.**

The cost per pupil in the Pittsburgh Public Schools is \$11,651 – a high price compared to other school districts throughout Pennsylvania and the region, including low-income districts. (See Chart A)

Chart A

The district's cost per pupil is 39% greater than the median per pupil cost throughout Pennsylvania and 19% higher than schools in Allegheny County, according to 2000-2001 data. To compare these costs another way, the Pittsburgh's public schools spend \$81,750 more than the Pennsylvania median to educate a class of 25 students.

**Too many school buildings and too few pupils to fill them saddle the district with excess capacity and higher than necessary operating costs.**

Pittsburgh keeps open far more public school facilities than it needs – a fact widely accepted by both administrators and elected officials, but one the Board of Education has been unable to effectively address.

The Pittsburgh School District operates 91 schools, including three special schools for students with disabilities. Enrollment in the district's 57 elementary schools range from 72 at Bon Air to 585 at Carmalt. The average elementary enrollment is 283 students per school. Enrollment in the district's 19 middle schools – not including the middle alternative school – ranges from 140 at Arlington Middle to 873 at Reizenstein. The average middle school enrollment is 392 students per school. In the 12 high schools – excluding Letsche – enrollment ranges from 408 students at South Vo-Tech to 1,556 at Allderdice. The average high school enrollment is 869 students.

At the conclusion 2002-03 school year, total enrollment in the Pittsburgh Public Schools stood at 34,411 students. These students attended classes in buildings that had the total capacity to accommodate 50,851 students. In other words, more than 15,000 additional students could be taught in the schools that are open today.

The excess capacity – now more than 30% – is expected to grow unless steps are taken to manage it more prudently. Less building space will be needed over the next 10 years. Enrollment is declining steadily and the trend is expected to continue.

Overall, Pennsylvania Department of Education projections show Allegheny County school enrollment falling 16% by 2011-12. Enrollment in the Pittsburgh Public Schools is projected to decline by 26% to fewer than 28,000 students. The decline is largely a matter of demographics – there are fewer children being born, and there will be fewer going to school.

To keep pace with such trends, the Pittsburgh Public Schools will have to close an average of three schools per year for the next decade. But if current classrooms remain open, by 2011-12 the district's excess capacity will reach nearly 23,000 students – a sum greater than the number of students who attend North Hills, Penn Hills, and Shaler Area, three of the largest Allegheny County school districts.

**Keeping unnecessary facilities open is an expensive practice.**

The average annual operating cost for each building in the Pittsburgh Public Schools is about \$171,000. Scheduled capital renovations and repairs range from \$100,000 to \$500,000 a year.

The district's large staff is partly due to keeping more schools open than are justified by enrollments. The district employed 5,640 full and part time staff in 2002-2003. Only about 50% were classroom teachers. Elsewhere in Pennsylvania, teachers account for an average of 59% of school staff.

Pupil-to-staff ratios have fallen to a costly 7-to-1 ratio in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, compared to the statewide average of 10 to 1. The most recent figures show that the district employs 138 principals and assistant principals; 211 secretaries, clerks, and data specialists; 559 in food service; 322 in cleaning services; 105 in security; and 63 in building maintenance.

The district's lack of a unified K-12 grade structure has also led to a need for additional schools. For example, middle school students can choose between regular middle schools and magnet schools or can remain in one of the six K-8 schools.

Closing the excess facilities can save the Pittsburgh Public Schools more than \$10 million a year.

Closing Scenario	
10 Elementary Schools, 2 Middle Schools and 1 Secondary School	
	Estimated Savings
Administrative Savings (1 Principal and 2 clerical support/school)	\$2,737,410
Teacher Savings (60 Elementary, 20 Middle, 15 Secondary)	\$7,485,050
Plant Operations Savings (Custodial and Building Operations)	\$1,105,000
Estimated Annual Savings from closing 13 bldgs	\$11,327,460
Cost per student savings	\$301

Chart B

**Public school teacher salaries in the Pittsburgh Public Schools are the highest in the nation and classes are characterized by relatively low pupil-to-teacher ratios.**

Teachers in the Pittsburgh Public Schools enjoy the highest maximum salary – when adjusted for cost of living – of any of the 100 largest school districts in the nation, according to an annual survey published by the American Federation of Teachers called “Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends”. And they reach the highest step on the pay scale in only 10 years – the fourth shortest path to the top in the country.

Offering high salaries provides the district with an effective tool for recruiting and retaining the best teachers. Teachers should be paid well, but the district lacks a system to ensure that it recruits, retains and rewards the best.

Pittsburgh’s experienced staff would be even more valuable if the most successful and experienced teachers were assigned to low-performing schools, where they are needed most. (Chart C) In 2002, for example, the average pay for teachers at Fort Pitt Elementary School was \$46,655, compared to the district average of \$57,475. Fort Pitt is one of the district’s lower-performing schools. In 2001, only about 15% of Fort Pitt students were proficient in math, according to standardized test results.

The district’s pupil-to-teacher ratio of 14 to 1 is low compared to the state average of 16 to 1. Keeping open too many buildings when there are too few students to fill them contributes to this low ratio. Unless steps are taken to adjust the teaching staff level to declining enrollment, the pupil-to-teacher ratio will continue to fall. Projections show that, to maintain the level of pupil-to-staff and pupil-to-teacher ratios in the next decade, the district will need to reduce its staff by more than 1,300.

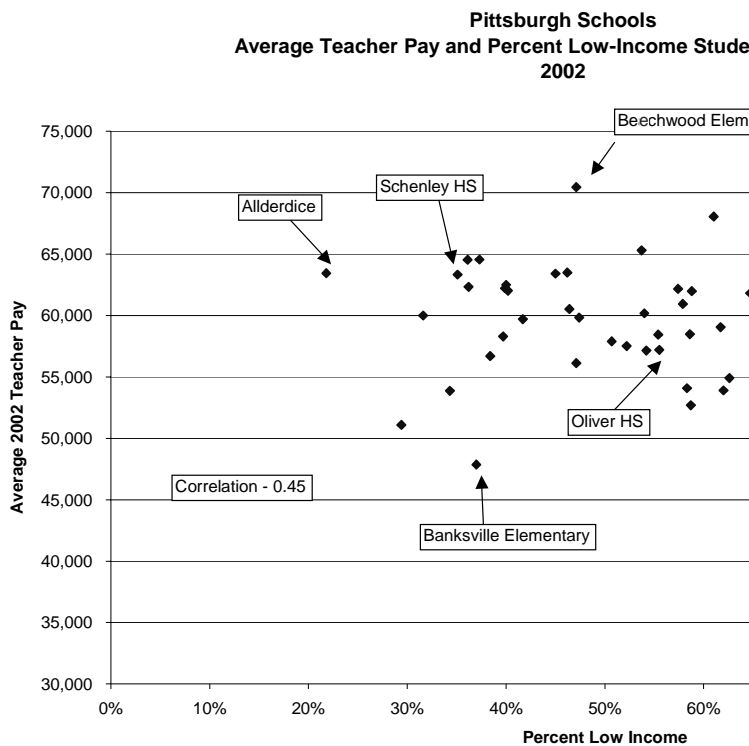


Chart C

A large share of the cost per pupil of any school district can be attributed to salaries, benefits, and training. In 2000-2001, salaries in Pennsylvania's 501 public school districts accounted for 51% of current expenditures.

**Unlike most urban school districts, the Pittsburgh Public Schools are currently fiscally sound. In fact, the potential for significant cost savings exists, based on the district's excess building and staff capacity and likely enrollment decline.**

Several factors suggest the district will be able to maintain good fiscal health for the near future and should be able to reduce taxes and still have funds available to invest in targeted, proven initiatives to improve student performance. For example:

- The district has accumulated an unnecessarily large fund balance of more than \$82 million – a sum twice as high as what some lawmakers believe is appropriate. The fund balance – simply assets minus liabilities – represents undesignated money available to the district. In Pittsburgh, this balance represents about 17% of the district's current budget. A proposed state law would limit such reserves to 8%.
- Funds set aside by the district for property tax assessment reductions are greater than what will likely be needed for refunds.
- The Governor's current budget proposal provides additional funding for local tax reductions, as well as money for early childhood education, full-day kindergarten, reducing class sizes, tutoring, and staff development.

School districts and other local government bodies maintain fund balances to help weather unexpected downturns in revenues and increases in expenditures.

- **Increased Rates**
  - Property by 2 mills to 13.9
  - Earned income by 0.125%
  - Deed transfer by 0.25% to
- **Increased Revenues**
  - \$35,943,071 in 2001
  - \$33,268,175 in 2002

Source: Treasurer for City and School District

Chart D

The Pittsburgh Public Schools built a very healthy fund balance over the past five years by keeping expenditures lower than expenses. The increase in the fund balance in 2002 alone was \$11 million. Contributing to that growth were property tax increases in 2001 and 2002, and an increase in the earned income tax rate in 2001, both of which led to a significant increase revenues in 2001 and 2002. (See Chart D) The district has also benefited from the county property reassessment.

In addition, the projected decreases in enrollments over the next decade may generate additional fund balance increases through lower costs.

A reasonable fund balance is necessary for several reasons. It is important from a bond-rating standpoint. And a reasonable fund balance provides sufficient working capital to avoid cash-flow problems and provides a financial cushion against unexpected economic downturns.

In Pittsburgh, the district is facing significant increases in pension and health care costs, according to the administrative staff. Maintaining a healthy fund balance will help the district meet the anticipated increases without having to raise taxes.

The National Advisory Council on State and Local Budgeting, in its publication, *Recommended Budget Practices*, recognizes the need to maintain a reasonable fund balance: "Governments should maintain a prudent level of financial resources to protect against reducing service levels or raising taxes and fees because of temporary revenue shortfalls or unpredicted one-time expenditures."

A large, under-used fund balance, however, can be viewed as an unnecessary accumulation of public money and is a disincentive to more efficiently manage school district finances.

The Pittsburgh Public Schools recently adopted a fund balance policy requiring the district to maintain a reserve balance equal to no less than one month's expenditures and no more than two month's expenditures. This will leave the unrestricted, undesignated fund balance in the 8% to 16% range. The fund balance at the end of 2002-2003, however, exceeds the high end of that range.

**State education subsidies for Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania's other public school districts fall far below the national average of state-provided school funding.**

The Pennsylvania constitution is clear about the state's obligation to support public education: "The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth."

But in Pennsylvania, state aid as a percentage of total educational funding has fallen from a high of 54% in the mid-1970s to about 36% today – a level far below the national average of 49%.

When state contributions shrink, local school districts – and local taxpayers – must make up the difference. In Pennsylvania, relying more on local taxpayers has led to greater inequities in school funding. Poor districts are less able to make up shortfalls in state support than are more affluent districts. At the same time, poor school districts are more likely to have larger numbers of high-needs students who require more expensive intervention.

State funding issues are even more of a concern today as school districts embark on ways to improve the academic performance of their students in order to meet higher proficiency standards required by federal law.

Several developments led to lower state subsidy rates in Pennsylvania. For example: In 1991, the state changed its formula for funding special education, resulting in local school districts paying a much larger share of the costs. In the Pittsburgh Public Schools, the state's share of special education has fallen from 70% to about 40% as a result. There is currently no relationship between state funding and local costs of special education. The budget surpluses Pennsylvania enjoyed in the 1990s were roughly equal to money saved by passing special education costs along to local school districts.

Pennsylvania also changed its calculations for funding basic education, moving from a subsidy based on a district's enrollment and tax base to a subsidy based on a percentage increase over the previous year's subsidy. As with special education, the state moved away from considering the actual costs of educating a student. And changes in enrollments and the tax base were no longer reflected in state funding.

The state has encouraged the development of charter schools, but only recently began providing funds to support them. In 2002-03 school year, the first year for charter school reimbursements, state funds covered no more than 30% of a district's additional costs for charter schools.

Finally, Pennsylvania is one of only nine states that fails to provide state funding for full-day kindergarten and other early education opportunities, despite a large body of evidence that suggests quality early learning experiences improve a child's chances of succeeding in school and later in life.

Gov. Rendell's proposed 2003-04 budget could reverse some of these trends. One of the governor's education goals is to begin to restore state aid to a 50% level through a combination of increases in the basic, special, and vocational education subsidies, along with increases in targeted aid for low-income and low-performing districts. Under the proposal, the state's share of education costs would increase to 38.5% in the coming school year, with additional increases in the following years.

The governor's basic education subsidy contains funding for 50% of the costs of full-day kindergarten. Preliminary figures suggest Pittsburgh would receive a 1.9% increase in its basic education subsidy and a 1.54% increase in the special education subsidy. New funding for Pittsburgh and other districts in Pennsylvania is contained in the governor's proposals for two new school improvement programs that would bring Pittsburgh a projected \$22.5 million.

- The state's \$309.1 million Early Childhood Education Fund would provide additional funds for full-day kindergarten for all schools. More money would also be provided to 146 low-income districts for pre-kindergarten and K-3 class size reductions. Low-income districts are defined as having more than 35% of students eligible for the federal free and reduced priced lunch program.
- The \$182.5 million Student Achievement Fund would provide tutoring to all students scoring below basic on PSSA exams and would provide reading and math coaches and staff development assistance to 146 low-income districts. The fund would also support family resource assistance for 19 districts with 60 % or more of their students eligible for free and reduced priced lunches.





# Leadership And Governance

## In The Pittsburgh Public Schools

Effective leadership is a prerequisite for an effective school district. For leadership to be effective, the school board and the administration must work as a team toward a goal of bringing out the best in every student. Only then will students reach their full potential and communities enjoy the benefits that a strong public school system can deliver.

In recent years, school reforms in large urban districts have been led by boards and administrators with a common vision and a commitment to work together to improve education. Without exception, the leaders in each of those districts have learned to make decisions with one question in mind: How does this improve the education of our children?

Members of the Pittsburgh Board of Public Education do not ask that question often enough, nor do they ask it in a single voice. The governance of the district has been characterized by sharp divisions among board members and by their lack of trust in the administration. The school board has based many of its decisions on the narrow concerns of their constituents and loyalty to their specific neighborhoods, rather than on sound educational policy and the interests of all children and all taxpayers in the Pittsburgh Public School District. In decision after decision, the board has repeatedly shown its inability to provide sound leadership.

It is misleading to suggest the leadership crisis in Pittsburgh's public schools is solely the result of the personal conflict, rancor, and discord that has been on public display for several years – or that it can be reversed by a change in electoral results. The problems are systemic, rooted in a governance structure that opens the door to board members with narrow agendas elected by a single district on the strength of relatively few votes.

Recent experience in Pittsburgh and other cities has shown that divided and myopic school leadership can discourage citizen participation, contribute to superintendent turnover, and elevate narrow interests over the broader good. It is clear such problems must be addressed immediately if Pittsburgh is to improve the academic performance of its public schools, operate them efficiently, and reduce the burden on taxpayers.

The ability of the Pittsburgh Board of Education to effectively lead efforts to improve the performance of all students in all city public schools is seriously compromised by mistrust, a failure to focus on the needs of the entire system, and a lack of vision.

Several characteristics of school governance in Pittsburgh compromise the ability of the Board of Education to effectively address critical education issues.

- The board lacks a common vision and sense of mission. Bitter dissension robs the board of focus and any hope of mustering the kind of unified commitment needed to tackle difficult issues.
- The board, in its course of business, too often fails to substantively address the learning needs of the district's children.
- Board members hold themselves accountable only to the constituencies that elected

- them and lack a broader perspective.
- The board lacks a mechanism that holds them accountable for their actions.

Commission interviews with current members of the school board revealed a striking lack of a common vision and sense of mission. The board members, for the most part, seemed unfamiliar with the district's strategic plan, even though that plan should be driving district performance.

The lack of mission, exacerbated by dissension among board members, has made it impossible for the board to focus on any single issue, even when that issue is as critical as student performance. In fact, the board's agenda has been dominated by matters other than student performance.

When the school board does address educational issues, it does so in contentious ways that undermine the district's own initiatives. The board's public challenges to the district's math programs, for example, cause doubt among principals and teachers about whether to take seriously the implementation of those programs. Consistent, sustained implementation of a curriculum is more important than which one is chosen. Educators are accustomed to seeing programs come and go, and dissension among the district's leaders promotes the belief that current programs will soon be abandoned.

Board members tend to see themselves as principally accountable to the constituencies that elected them, not to the district as a whole or to all of its students. The lack of trust among board members and between the board and the superintendent has made assembling a unified leadership team virtually impossible and factionalism an inevitability.

Nothing other than the next election cycle holds the Pittsburgh Board of Education accountable for its actions or the performance and efficiency of the schools. And only infrequently has student performance emerged as an issue in school board elections.

**Long-simmering tensions among members of the Board of Education and between several board members and the administration have diminished the abilities of both to serve the interests of the district's schoolchildren.**

Several factors contribute to the difficult relationship between the board and administration.

- Sharp policy differences with regard to academic and management issues divide several board members and the superintendent. These differences have lingered for several years.
- Conflict over the appropriate roles of board members and superintendent arises from a lack of understanding of the difference between management and governance.
- Mistrust of the administration and the fact that few board members have the professional skills necessary to address all of the issues inherent in governing an organization as large and complex as the Pittsburgh Public Schools has led to the hiring of consultants who second guess the work of the administration, heightening tensions and further blurring lines of authority, appropriate roles, and communication.
- The state's school code has not been modified for over 50 years. As written, the

school code can be read to give the board full control of every aspect of operations.

The bitter relationship between the school board majority and central administration not only undermines the implementation of promising instructional initiatives, but also has serious long-term consequences for the quality of staff that the district is able to recruit and retain. The breakdown of school board-staff relationships can discourage high-quality candidates for school- and district-level leadership positions from applying for those jobs. Several key central office staff have departed over the past 18 months and, in some cases, their acrimonious relationships with board members are a matter of public record. Replacing these key staff members has not been easy. The position of assessment director, for example, has been vacant for nearly a year. The superintendent publicly acknowledged that the district's troubles reduced the pool of applicants for the position of Chief Academic Officer.

Conflict over the appropriate roles of board members and the superintendent is rooted in a general lack of understanding of the difference between governance and management, and between policymaking and executing policy. The elected Pittsburgh Board of Education, rather than exercising its responsibility for fiscal oversight in a constructive manner, has tended toward micro-management.

The literal language of the state's School Code gives school boards control of almost every aspect of district operations, enabling boards to micro-manage their districts to the extent that the superintendent becomes little more than a highly-paid observer. Many school boards around the state, however, have learned to interpret the code in ways that build effective relations between the board and superintendent. Effective school boards understand that, for the schools to succeed, administrators must have the latitude to apply their skills toward making the schools safe havens for learning and achievement.

**The Pittsburgh Board of Education's ability to effectively govern is hampered by poor communication, little use of thorough, research-based information, and the lack of a reliable method of evaluating programs and policy options.**

Respectful, constructive communication among school board members and between the board and the administration is lacking. It is an important reason why the Board of Education and administration have been unable to build a sense of shared mission.

The school board often balks at delegating authority, largely because members mistrust one another and several mistrust the administration. As a result, the full board participates in almost every aspect of board business, an unnecessary exercise that consumes time better spent deliberating critical matters, such as how to improve flagging student performance.

The Board of Education has no method of gathering thorough, reliable data or for evaluating programs. The board relies little on data when making decisions.

No special training is offered board members, even those new to the job. The board is also without a professional development program for its members.

Such shortcomings in governance have hindered the school board's ability to make in-

formed decisions on such critical matters as closing schools that falling enrollments have left under-used. With little or no objective data to drive a rational discussion, school board members tend to take inflexible positions based largely on politics and the special interests of the neighborhoods that elect them.

**Voter turn-out in Pittsburgh's school board elections has been disappointingly low and has opened the door to special interest candidates to assume control over district-wide policy and practices.**

In the 2001 primary election, when five Board of Education seats were at stake, 32% of the city's registered voters went to the polls, but only 22% cast ballots for school board candidates. Such a low turn-out is not unusual. School board elections in Pittsburgh have historically drawn disappointing numbers. In recent elections, school board seats have been decided by turn-outs as small as 7% of the registered voters in a particular district. (Analysis of voter turnout results are in the Appendix on page 100.)

**A permanent change in the structure of school governance – not merely a temporary fix at the polls – is necessary if the district is to avoid the kind of leadership crisis that has undermined the city's public schools in recent years.**

Electing school board members by geographic areas invites a parochial view of issues brought before the board. Members too often feel obligated to consider the narrow interests of their constituents first, rather than what is in the best interests of the district as a whole. The current governance structure of the Pittsburgh Board of Education has contributed to a crisis in leadership that has aggravated the problems of poor student performance, high costs, high taxes, and gross inequities in the quality of education offered to all students.

Even if the next election delivers a more capable board, the incentives inherent in the structure of a geographically-based elected board mean that the problems that render the current school board ineffective will inevitably resurface.

A fundamental, structural solution to the problems of school governance is necessary if the district is to see an agenda of fundamental reform through to its end.

In districts where education reform has been implemented, significant change came only when political stability and agreement on reform strategies were reached. A recent publication of the National School Board Association, The Key Work of School Boards, identifies what school boards need to do to become effective leaders in efforts to improve student learning:

- **Build a vision** for student achievement that reflects the common values and core beliefs of the community. That vision is shared by the board, superintendent, and the community, and the board must play a central role in connecting that vision with the community.
- **Set standards** as the foundation for a district-wide learning system. Standards give a common focus to classroom instruction assessments and resource use. Standards help teachers and principals set priorities for use of instructional time. They also establish consistent expectations, challenging all children to receive a quality education, while encouraging the community to buy into the standards.
- **Assessment**:. Multiple student assessment systems are needed and they must be aligned with academic standards and with state standards, understood by the

- board, and clearly explained to the community
- **Accountability:** A strong process focuses on student results. Student data are analyzed with respect to growth and improvement, not just end results. Student results are included as part of staff evaluation. Student results drive decision making
  - **Alignment:** Curriculum, programs, and resources are all directly aligned with the student achievement priorities that the district establishes as goals and standards.
  - **Climate:** The learning environment sets the stage for teaching and learning. The overall climate of a school and the specific learning environment of an individual classroom have enormous influence on student achievement, and influence community confidence in the public schools. Establishing a healthy climate in which to learn includes maintaining a safe, caring, and inviting environment and having the flexibility and capacity to provide alternative settings for students who need additional structure or support.
  - **Collaboration:** The board's job is to bring the whole community to the education table.
  - **Continuous improvement:** This is not a particular set of tools, but rather a mind set that relies on good information. Reliable data will support the board and staff as they seek ways to refine, strengthen, modify or eliminate existing programs and practices. The productive mindset include the willingness and discipline to question, examine, revise, refine, and revisit.

**Several urban districts, when faced with a similar leadership crisis, successfully abandoned elected school boards in favor of boards appointed by mayors.**

Education reform is spreading throughout the nation's urban school districts. It has led several urban districts experiencing low student performance and dysfunctional leadership to abandon their elected school boards.

Some of these cities asked their mayors to appoint all school board members. In others, a mix of mayor-appointed and elected members sit on the school board. Citizen outrage over student performances and school conditions led to fundamental changes in school governance in cities such as Cleveland, Boston, and Chicago. In each, mayors have been asked to help efforts to improve the public schools by appointing competent, disciplined, and dedicated school boards to govern them. And each has made progress in raising student test scores and narrowing learning gaps by focusing issues of education and student need. (A survey of other cities in the nation and their governance structures is included in the Appendix on page 130.)

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# Recommendations

## of The Mayor's Commission On Public Education

A high-performance, fiscally-responsible, more accountable school district is within the city's reach. But achieving that critical goal will require an agenda of bold, fundamental reform, and a new openness to community involvement. The Mayor's Commission on Public Education developed such an agenda based on nine months of careful study. The agenda is summarized in the following pages as a series of principal and supporting recommendations.

The gravity of the problems that confront the Pittsburgh Public School demanded careful, thorough, objective examination. The Commission, its staff and consultants reviewed research and best practices related to schools and learning; studied the experiences of other urban districts that have embarked on reform; and interviewed Pittsburgh Board of Education members, administrators, and teachers. A series of public meetings were held throughout the city to hear the ideas and concerns of parents, senior citizens, neighborhood advocates, business owners, religious organizations, and others. (See "Mission, Priorities & Process" starting on page 11 of this report for details of the Commission's three committees and how each went about its work of investigating governance, finance, and student achievement issues, assessing the information, and drafting its recommendations).

The Commission members fully reviewed and discussed the implications of the recommendations that were built upon the findings of each committee. Each recommendation was carefully considered and measured by the answer to one basic question: Does it improve the performance and growth of students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools?

Each principal and supporting recommendation was approved by the Commission as a whole. The recommendations were approved unanimously.

The breadth of the problems that grip the Pittsburgh Public Schools today requires a comprehensive, long-term solution. The Commission is convinced that the following five principal recommendations, enacted as a complete package, represent such a solution – a blueprint for better school performance, higher expectations, greater fiscal responsibility, greater accountability, and excellence and equity in the city's public schools. Putting this blueprint in place will require the resolve of all sectors of the community and a city-wide expectation of excellence for the schools.

# Principal Recommendations

**1. The Pittsburgh Board of Education should be appointed by the Mayor from a pool of candidates provided by a nominating commission whose members reflect the racial, geographic, professional, and economic diversity of the city.**

The Mayor should appoint all of the members of an 11-member Board of Education. In identifying candidates, a nominating commission will consider factors that include race, gender, economic and geographic diversity, parent involvement, and professional expertise in areas such as education, administration, law, and finance. The Mayor's nominees will require confirmation by the City Council and their four-year terms will be staggered. Other characteristics of the board include:

- The appointed Board of Education will continue to govern the school district and approve its annual budget, but it will not levy taxes. The Pennsylvania constitution prohibits an appointed body from levying taxes.
- The city will assume taxing authority for the school district. Statutes will require the city to provide adequate funding to meet school district needs.
- As is common practice, the school administration will prepare a balanced budget, which is subject to revision and approval by the school board.
- The school board will ask City Council to continue or to revise the existing tax rate, depending on what is needed to balance the school budget. Raising or lowering taxes will require the city to enact legislation. No action is necessary if the tax rate remains the same.
- Council will not have a line item veto or any other power to amend the school budget.
- State legislation will be required to implement an appointed school board.

The Commission is convinced that such a fundamental, structural solution to the problems of school governance is necessary to move an agenda of reform forward. And the Commission is heartened by promising signs in Boston and other urban districts that already have moved to an appointed school board model.

Fundamental school reform requires a unified board that is able to work in harmony with the school administration. It requires a board with an abiding commitment to improving the classroom performance of all students. It requires a board with the expertise to govern a \$486 million-a-year school system and the will to make tough decisions to trim millions in unnecessary spending that contributes to high costs and high taxes.

The current, elected Board of Education lacks these essential qualities. Moreover, the basic structure of the current governance model – a school board elected by geographic district – invites the deep divisions and narrow perspectives that undermine the schools and the system. No matter what the result of the next election, the leadership crisis seen today will inevitably resurface as long as board members are chosen by district in low-turn-out elections, which enable small groups of voters with narrow agendas to gain considerable sway over policy affecting all students and taxpayers.

The Commission's Governance and Leadership Committee was careful to thoroughly research this issue, fully realizing the district-wide implications of such bold reform and that an appointed school board is an idea likely to attract controversy. The committee's work included assessing the elected Board of Education's performance; interviewing a range of people, from school officials past and present to governance and leadership experts; and investigating governance models practiced in other U.S. cities.

As with all recommendations presented in this report, the full Commission unanimously approved the recommendation that the Pittsburgh Public Schools be governed by a school board appointed by the city's mayor.

(See "Mission, Priorities & Process" starting on page 11 of this report for details of the Governance and Leadership Committee and how it went about its work of investigating school governance issues, assessing the information, and drafting its recommendations).

The Commission studied a broad range of school governance models. These included:

- A school board elected by district.
- A school board elected at large.
- A hybrid elected school board, in which some of its members are elected at large and some members elected by district.
- A school board whose members are all appointed, usually by the city's mayor.
- A hybrid school board in which some of its members are elected and others are appointed.
- A model in which the school board is eliminated entirely and the public school system becomes another city agency.

Reasons varied for eliminating from consideration governance models other than a mayor-appointed school board. Serious consideration was given to an at-large elected board and to various models of hybrid boards. But it was felt an at-large elected board could not guarantee adequate racial and geographic balance on a board representing a diverse urban public school system. The Governance and Leadership Committee also concluded the hybrid board models were likely to result in a board divided among those elected and those who are appointed. In other words, such a model ran the risk of institutionalizing the kind of division and conflict that today cripples the Pittsburgh Board of Education. Some cities where such hybrid boards sit have experienced such difficulties.

The Commission is convinced that a school board appointed by the Mayor is the best possible option for reversing the troubling state of affairs in the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Accountability was a key factor in considering school governance models – one that made a mayor-appointed school board stand out from the other options considered. When given the responsibility of selecting the board, the Mayor inherits a degree of accountability for how the schools perform, which is something clearly lacking from the way the city's public schools are governed today. Vesting such responsibility in the Mayor helps ensure that the schools are accountable to the city as a whole, rather than to small, well-organized interest groups. The Commission believes that such circumstances provide the incentive to chose

members on the basis of competence and commitment to improving the entire school system so that both students and taxpayers gain.

**2. The school district's unnecessarily large fund balance should be pared to allow for an immediate reduction in property taxes and the creation of a Student Performance Improvement Fund. In addition, further tax reductions and investments in student achievement should be considered with funds saved from trimming excess building capacity.**

The city's public schools keep more than \$82 million in reserve – about 17% of the district's total operating budget. It is an exorbitant amount for any school district to hold in reserve. It is particularly troubling in a district where taxpayers shoulder a heavy burden. Most school districts maintain an annual reserve, or fund balance, of about 8% of total operating funds.

For Pittsburgh, a school system more complex than many, the Commission recommends the district maintain a fund balance of 10% – about \$50 million a year. Paring the fund balance to this level will result in an immediate savings of at least \$30 million. The Commission recommends investing the windfall in the following manner:

- Immediately reduce property taxes by two mills.
- Seed a new Student Performance Improvement Fund that will be used to fuel the drive toward marked improvement in academic achievement throughout the district.

Such a plan represents a measured approach to shrinking the fund balance over a reasonable period of time.

Limiting the reserve to 10% will also encourage the district to have a “structurally-balanced” budget – one that uses ongoing operating revenues to fund regular operating expenditures. The Government Finance Officers Association encourages governments to adopt structurally-balanced budgets.

School district leadership should also work to “right size” the system. Enrollment in the Pittsburgh Public Schools is projected to decline by 26% to fewer than 28,000 students by 2011-2012. This steady and steep decline, due largely to a decrease in the number of children being born in the city, must be addressed today to avoid further needless spending.

For far too long, prudent management of the district's cost structure has been neglected. Failure to trim excess funds and facilities and to otherwise adapt to shrinking student enrollment drains public funds from the schools that could be invested in academic improvement initiatives and be used to reduce taxes in coming years.

Right-sizing requires ongoing, objective, and expert evaluation of school funds, building capacities, and staff sizes. It is estimated that, for example, to maintain the desired pupil-staff ratios over the next decade, the school district will need to reduce staff by more than 1,300. Such a reduction, while steep in appearance, is justified by shrinking enrollments expected in the coming years and can also likely be accomplished by turnover and attrition.

The reductions in staff will allow the district to save about \$10 million a year for a total of \$74 million by the end of the decade.

The Commission is confident that right-sizing through prudent management of district finances and resources will provide the opportunity to invest as much as \$8.5 million a year in the Student Performance Improvement Fund and reduce property taxes by an additional four mills over the next decade.

**3. An independent School Consolidation Commission should be appointed to efficiently, professionally, and objectively manage school district facilities as a real estate portfolio.**

Pittsburgh keeps open too many schools and has too much building capacity than is justified by enrollment. It is a costly practice that will become more expensive for district taxpayers if allowed to continue in the coming years, when public school enrollments in Pittsburgh are projected to continue to decline markedly.

Excess schools and excess capacity unnecessarily add to building and maintenance, staff, teacher, capital, and other costs. The district's lack of a unified K-12 grade structure has also led to a need for additional schools.

To curb unnecessary spending, close unneeded facilities, and professionally manage district resources, the Commission recommends creating an independent Schools Consolidation Commission with the expertise to assess district properties and the will to trim excess capacity. The School Consolidation Commission will present to the school board a "package" of facilities to open and close that the board will vote to approve or reject. Its recommendations will be based on projected enrollments and other objective criteria, including geographic balance and student diversity, to make sure the district maintains the appropriate number of buildings.

The work of the Consolidation Commission will be based on a plan of grade configurations, such as K-5 or K-8, and academic programs, such as magnet schools, that the administration and school board decide best promote student achievement. The Consolidation Commission will carefully consider how its decisions about specific schools will affect student achievement.

The Board of Education will be required to approve or reject the recommended package without modification or substitution.

The elected school board has long lacked the political will to reduce the number of unnecessary facilities, particularly those within their respective districts. The price of preserving neighborhood schools is high. Based on state standards, the buildings open today can accommodate 30% more students than are currently enrolled. Even considering recent recommendations for small class sizes, 25% of the district's building capacity is unused. Under-used buildings are expensive, adding unnecessary operating, maintenance, staff, teacher, and administrative costs to the budget. Excess capacity contributes to the district's 7 to 1 pupil-to-staff ratio – one of the most expensive in the state. The district also has vacant buildings it can sell now and is expected to have more in the future when enroll-

ments fall even more.

Trimming excess building capacity to no more than 20% above enrollment will save \$600,000-\$700,000 a year in building and maintenance costs. Add the savings from reductions in staff and teacher salaries, capital costs and other expenses that would result and the district will save more than \$10 million a year.

The five-member School Consolidation Commission will provide an objective review of the district's building requirements and real estate portfolio, as well as a long-term plan for efficiently balancing the needs of the schools with available resources.

The chair of the School Consolidation Commission would be appointed by the board from a pool of candidates nominated by the mayor. The remaining members would be appointed by the chair, but must be confirmed by the school board. Appointments made by the chairperson must include recognized experts in real estate, facilities management, and school finance.

Facility studies will be reviewed and updated regularly, allowing the district to more accurately determine operating and capital needs for all of its facilities. Such a School Consolidation Commission is expected to help to insulate elected officials from the bitter politics of school openings and closings. This, in turn, is expected to help pave the way for the district to develop a unified K-12 grade structure and building plan.

The district will provide the Consolidation Commission with an inventory of its space needs based on the district's academic program, curriculum, and grade structure. The Consolidation Commission will evaluate the district's building portfolio and draft a facilities plan that will support the district's educational program, hold down operating costs, and minimize capital expenditures. In doing so, the Consolidation Commission will be able to consider enrollment projections, building conditions, and district-wide operating costs, including transportation costs.

The complexity and politically sensitive nature of facilities issues will require special legislation to implement the recommendations. The state legislature should be asked to amend the school code to enable the School Consolidation Commission to consider the long-term facility needs of the district.

Fewer buildings will reduce operating costs and preserve capital resources. A reduction in excess capacity will also result in a small increase in reimbursements from the state for capital projects. Over time, the school district should be able to replace aging buildings with modern facilities.

Consolidation, for all of its potential benefits, should be done carefully with improving student performance in mind. The district should take advantage of the academic and social advantages of small schools in assessing its facilities decisions. One option is to move to district-wide K-8 schools, which reduce disruptive transitions. Another is to make every school a school of distinction. Each school would include a special program – intensive

science or foreign language, for example – to enhance the core academic achievement of students. Research suggests that what truly matters for children is to be in a school where they are known and where curriculum can be personalized, is coherent throughout the school and clearly progresses from grade to grade, and where staff take responsibility for each child.

**4. The school board and the administration (district leadership) should send a clear and unified message to the public of their commitment to improving student performance – one that sets high expectations for all students, invites the participation of parents and the community, and holds district leadership accountable for achieving the goals it sets.**

More specifically, district leadership should:

- Establish measurable and specific goals for achievement, including:
  - increasing proficiency levels in reading and math,
  - reducing the achievement gap between races and between low-income students and more affluent students,
  - improving graduation and attendance rates,
  - increasing the number of students enrolled in advanced courses, and improving post-graduation outcomes.
- Agree on a clear strategy for achieving those goals, aggressively publicize the strategy, and pursue it in a coherent, consistent, sustained manner.
- Actively seek new ways to intensively involve parents, businesses, religious institutions, and other community organizations in the education of the city's children.
- Report to the public each year on the district's progress toward meeting its goals.

The people of Pittsburgh have not heard a clear message about school district goals and plans. They have not heard a clear message describing the district's progress. District leadership has not been able to achieve the kind of consensus necessary to produce a clear message or strategy for improving education in the city's public schools.

One of the school board's primary responsibilities should be to rally parents and the community behind a drive for academic excellence, but there is little evidence that the current elected board takes this responsibility seriously. Too often, the board neglects the fundamental issue of student achievement.

Improving the performance of all students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools demands from district leadership clarity of purpose, a strategy for achieving desired results, the willingness to cultivate and make use of the resources of family and community, and the courage to be held accountable for school outcomes.

**5. An Independent Alliance for School Improvement should be recruited to monitor the progress of reform, regularly report back to the public, and engage a range of community partners in the effort to improve the educational outcomes of public school students.**

The bold agenda of reform recommended by the Commission will not be accomplished overnight or without controversy. The Commission concludes that an independent alliance of community members is needed to watch over the process, keep the public focused on improving the schools, ensure accountability, and link the schools with diverse resources within the community.

Although it is reasonable to expect the district to report to the public at least once every year, there exists a conflict of interest for any organization reporting on its own performance. An independent, external organization focused on improving student achievement will help ensure objective oversight and steady support for reform initiatives.

Every major city that has embarked on fundamental school reform has had as its partner an empowered civic organization. These community alliances contribute in various ways. They help fund school improvement programs and provide student scholarships. They build partnerships with businesses, institutions of higher learning and other organizations, linking them with schools that can use tutoring, mentoring, and technological and financial support. They help develop academic standards and conduct and publish research on important issues. They also help raise outside funds for the public schools.



# Supporting Recommendations

## Leadership and Governance

The move to a mayor-appointed school board is not expected to be easy or quick. The problems facing the Pittsburgh Public Schools, however, demand immediate attention. The Commission recommends the following steps be taken immediately to enable district leadership to more effectively respond to the urgent needs of the public schools.

**School governance should follow modern management principles, entrusting the Board of Education with deciding issues of policy and the superintendent with implementing policy.**

The responsibilities of the board and the superintendent should be aligned in ways that best advance the work of the schools. The board should determine all questions of general policy. The focus of the board should be on the learning and achievement of the city's public school students. The superintendent should act as the district's Chief Executive Officer, whose role is to manage the district and implement policy. Such a division of labor already is in place in most for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, including most school boards.

To eliminate confusion, these responsibilities should be clear and formalized. At present, the 50-year-old state code gives the Board of Education broad powers. Superintendents may have a seat on their district's boards and speak to school matters, but they are not given a vote. While practices have developed over the years to enable the superintendent to operate the district, the law still leaves defining the superintendent's role in the hands of the board. A formally-declared division of duties would clarify the school board's vision, direction, and policy tasks, in addition to the superintendent's responsibility in the areas of policy implementation, strategy, and the day-to-day management of the schools.

The basics of dividing responsibilities among school leaders are found in the literature on effective governance practices and in statutes from a number of states that address school governance. In general, effective governance owes much to how responsibilities are divided among those in the senior levels of an enterprise. These responsibilities include management, oversight, policymaking, and strategy.<sup>1</sup> Boards of directors are responsible for the direction and management of the enterprise, but how they choose to exercise that responsibility is critical. To varying degrees, boards delegate different features of the overall enterprise. How authority is shared between the board and chief executive – for day-to-day operations, policy, strategy, overall management – is what constitutes the system of governance. A key element is how the board manages itself in doing its job.

The school board must determine the degree of authority that will allow the superintendent to execute the overall objectives set by the board. Given too little authority, it is difficult for a superintendent to be an effective leader within the schools and it is difficult for the board to evaluate the performance of the superintendent.

Effective school boards realize that for schools to be successful, administrators must be given the latitude to apply their skills toward making the schools safe havens for learning, where all students are afforded the opportunity to perform at the highest levels.

**The Board of Education should acknowledge and formalize the responsibilities of the Board President, which include cultivating a shared sense of mission, managing open communications, encouraging meaningful participation, and fostering civility and cooperation among board members.**

A school board is an organization that, by law, has authority only when it acts as a body. The duty of its officers is to facilitate the board, not exercise authority themselves. The board president is responsible for making sure the board functions effectively and that the integrity of the board process is preserved at all times.

Any board member who assumes – or aspires to assume – the office of board president should recognize and accept the special responsibilities of that position. No school board can function effectively without leadership from its president. The deep and persistent divisions in the current elected school board are strong indications that such leadership is lacking. A committed Board President must view a decision made by a closely divided vote as a failure of leadership.

The school board and the community have the right and the responsibility to hold the Board President to this high standard. Legislative action is not required to implement this recommendation. However, a resolution incorporating the intent of the recommendation should be unanimously adopted by the board.

**An orientation program for new board members and continuing professional development for all board members should be required.**

School boards in high-performing districts assign themselves the task of continual self-assessment and continuous improvement. In its recent publication, The Key Work of School Boards, the National School Boards Association focuses on the importance of this activity. The district should institute both programs.

In some states, such support is mandatory at the state level. Many state and national sources offer materials and other resources. Public policy and management and business school resources from the city's universities could be directed toward this effort. The school board should hold regular workshops – at least four times a year – to enhance focus and self assessment.

**The board should accept, as its explicit duty, the obligation to provide community leadership on educational issues and to advocate on behalf of children and public education at the local, state and federal levels.**

The Board of Education must accept the responsibility that comes with being a leader in the community. The high profile that the school board commands obligates its members to demonstrate reason, respect, and thoughtful deliberation.

Improving the performance of all students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools demands from district leadership clarity of purpose, a strategy for achieving desired results, and the courage to be held accountable for school outcomes.

## School Funding and Financial Management

**The Pittsburgh Public Schools must develop staffing plans to adjust to declining enrollment, which is expected to continue long into the future.**

The Commission recommends that the district adjust its staffing levels so that the pupil-to-staff ratio remains at 8 to 1 and the pupil-to-teacher ratio remains at 14 to 1. Staff reductions, however, should not include “classroom-type” personnel, such as aides and classroom coaches who directly support the educational mission, but are counted as non-teaching personnel in budget documents.

The district has pupil-to-staff and pupil-to-teacher ratios that are among the most costly in Pennsylvania. It is important that the continued decrease in enrollments throughout the district be considered. Enrollment is expected to fall by 26% over the next decade. Given such decline, the district will need to reduce staff by more than 1,300 over the next decade to meet the recommended staffing levels.

Classroom teachers make up about 50% of the staff, compared to 59% statewide. Teachers account for 85% of the professionals in schools. The remainder are principals, librarians, counselors, reading specialists and other specialized professionals.

The large staff size owes partly to the need for special programs and the availability of special program funding that supports many staff members. The most recent figures show 88 district staff supported by federal special education funds; 828 supported, in part, by state special education funds; 186 supported by federal Title I funds; and 138 supported by federal Head Start funds. A total of 2,035, in other words, have at least part of their salaries paid through outside grants and funds.

But the large staff is also a consequence of the district’s failure to trim excess building capacity – close school buildings as enrollments continue to decline. Staff and teacher salaries represent a significant share of the cost of keeping unneeded buildings open.

Pittsburgh benefits from having highly experience teachers in its classrooms, unlike many urban districts. The benefits, however, come at a price: Pittsburgh public school teachers enjoy the highest top-scale salaries among the nation’s 100 largest districts, when cost of living is considered. Using teachers wisely is an important factor in managing the costs of the school district.

**The local civic, business and political community should lead the effort to increase state funding to the 50% level consistent with the national average.**

State aid as a percentage of total education funding has declined from a high of 54% in the mid 1970s to the current level of about 36% – well below the national average of 49%. The increase in state funding should be targeted with a special focus on funding early childhood education, increasing special education reimbursements, and paying for the costs of charter schools.

Local school districts have made up the difference as the state’s contributions to education declined. The greater reliance on local taxpayers has led to a greater inequities in school

funding. Poor districts are less able to make up shortfalls in state support than are more affluent districts. In addition, poor districts are more likely to have a larger population of high-needs students. In January 2003, Education Week gave Pennsylvania a B for adequacy in state and local funding for education and a D-minus for equity.

The Governor's proposed 2003-04 budget indicated that his administration is aware of the problem and looking at a goal of restoring state aid to the 50% level.

The Pittsburgh Public Schools and other public school districts in Pennsylvania will realize a number of benefits from restoring state education subsidies to the 50% level. For example, a more equitable system of funding public education will result. The burden on local wage and property taxes will be substantially reduced, which, in Pittsburgh, will help to attract families to the city. And early education opportunities for young children across the state will increase. Pennsylvania is one of only nine states that fails to provide public funding for full-day kindergarten and other early education opportunities.

**The district should adopt a budget process and calendar that matches the state's fiscal year and allows ample time to consider alternatives and accommodate school board and citizen response.**

The district should abandon its January through December fiscal year in favor of the July through June fiscal year used by the state and every other school district in western Pennsylvania.

The calendar should allow for the following to occur before final budget adoption:

- Review of program and facility plans and state appropriations.
- Review of school-by-school preliminary allocations by school staff to align budget requests with program and enrollment needs.
- Identification of potential savings and efficiencies.
- Earlier board involvement in all major budget preparation stages.
- Focus on outcomes and performance.
- An open, transparent process with sufficient public hearings and public testimony.

Given its size, Pittsburgh Public Schools has a complex budget process. Complicating the process is the district's use of a January-through-December fiscal year, rather than a July-through-June fiscal year. This presents a number of unnecessary hardships. For example:

- Each spring, the Pittsburgh Public Schools budget for the next academic year. Expenditures fall into two budgets – one passed at the end of the previous calendar year and another that will be passed at the end of the current calendar year.
- Pittsburgh's January-through-December fiscal year is off-cycle with both the academic year and the state's fiscal year, generally confusing the financial picture, while making it difficult for the district to estimate the amount of state funding for the next budget year. The state and every other school district in Western Pennsylvania follows a July-through-June fiscal year.

In recent years, the school board has not fully involved itself in the budget process until the end of the calendar year. By then, many decisions concerning individual school budgets have already been made. Significant last-minute changes in a proposed budget can result in significant changes in school programs in the middle of the academic year. The built-in

uncertainty also requires the district to maintain a large fund balance to cover the changes.

The budget process should be a year-round effort to match reasonable costs with available resources, provide ongoing opportunities for the board and the public to review program costs and benefits, and encourage innovation and cost-cutting measures in a relentless quest for savings. It should also inspire communication between the board and the administration, involve schools in the setting of spending priorities, and initiate a dialogue on student performance and financial issues.

(See “Mission, Priorities & Process” starting on page 11 of this report for details of the School Funding and Financial Management Committee and how it went about its work of investigating issues related to school finance, assessing the information, and drafting recommendations).

## Student Performance, Accountability and Standards

Several promising initiatives and practices are found throughout the Pittsburgh Public Schools. The school district, however, is lacking the unified leadership to promote focus, accountability, capacity, efficiency, and community involvement. The following recommendations are offered to support the vision of the Mayor’s Commission on Public Education of realizing a high-performing public school system in Pittsburgh.

**From the board room to the classroom, every decision should be based on data about how it affects student performance.**

The district needs an assessment system that supports evaluation, accountability and the improvement of classroom instruction. In order to effectively serve all of these purposes, the assessment system must be aligned with the district’s curricula and the state’s learning standards; it must provide teachers with timely feedback throughout the school year, and it must follow the progress of individual students.

The district’s new electronic data warehouse creates the basic infrastructure for such a system, but the applications must be developed (or purchased), staff must be trained, and data must be entered in order to realize the potential of the data warehouse, so that the system becomes capable of providing measures of student achievement throughout the school year and of providing evidence of how effective programs, individual schools, and teachers are in raising student achievement. Curricula should remain consistent in all schools across the district.

The school district administers the PSSA exams, as required by all schools in the state. But those exams are given only in occasional grades and are not suited for instructional purposes, because the results come back after the end of the school year. The exams are also not suited for evaluative purposes because they do not follow individual students over time and cannot assess gains in learning.

Additional assessments beyond the state-mandated PSSA are therefore essential, and the district uses a variety of assessments in reading and math in different grades. Unfortu-

nately, however, the board and administration are not always in agreement about the desired characteristics of assessments, and the result is a system that is not always well-aligned with curricula.

Currently, the district has better systems for ongoing diagnosis and instructional improvement than for the year-to-year examination of progress that is necessary for evaluative purposes. To diagnose students' learning needs and guide teaching, the district has a number of short assessments in reading and math that are administered by classroom teachers several times each year. These assessments should be encouraged, and, where possible, fully integrated into students' central electronic records so that results are easily accessible to both teachers and principals. Teachers and principals can use the results of these short, occasional assessments to determine where students need help in meeting standards and preparing for high-stakes exams such as the PSSA. The district's professional development program should include mandatory training for both teachers and principals in the analysis and use of achievement data.

The rigorous and valid analysis of achievement data for evaluative purposes is not a simple task. Ideally, it requires three elements: a central data system that records results for every student in the district over time; assessments that are developmentally scaled across grade levels to measure student growth; and the analytic capacity in the central office to understand appropriate and inappropriate uses of the data. The district's new electronic record system, by integrating all information available for every student in the district, will establish the data infrastructure that is necessary for sophisticated analysis of achievement results. Unfortunately, the district's various assessments are not currently designed to measure student progress over time, an essential element for measuring the added value provided by schools or teachers.

More importantly, the district does not today have the analytic capacity to use the data effectively: the chief assessment officer departed last year and has yet to be replaced.

**The district should invest in excellence for all district staff to ensure that it employs the best teachers and principals available.**

High-quality teachers and principals are the critical ingredients for promoting student achievement. Pittsburgh has many strong teachers and principals. But the district could do more to ensure that Pittsburgh's public school students have access to the best teachers and principals. Steps that should be taken to accomplish this include the following:

- Provide financial incentives to recruit, retain, and reward principals and teachers who are effective at promoting student achievement. Every study on school reform points to the key role of principals in improving student achievement. Principal salaries should be raised district-wide to more fairly reflect their responsibilities and to attract better applicants. Bonuses should be available to principals whose schools are effective at raising the achievement levels of their students. Every study on school reform points to the key role of principals in improving student achievement.
- In cooperation with the union, the district should design a career ladder and compensation system that rewards teachers for effective instruction and for achievement

- gains among their students.
- Increase coaching support in classrooms and mandatory professional development specifically related to instructional initiatives.
  - Focus recruitment and retention policies for teachers and principals on excellence, recruiting the best available principals from within and from outside the district, and changing the point system for ranking teacher applicants to favor the most highly-qualified, particularly those with National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification.

An extensive and focused investment in the professional development of the teaching staff is common among high-performing school districts. Research suggests that professional development is most effective when it is offered on-site in schools and classrooms and closely linked to the district's instructional initiatives.

In Pittsburgh's public schools, a multitude of professional development opportunities for teachers are offered, including classroom-based coaching in the district's programs in reading and math. But most of the programs are voluntary and participants find wide variation in quality. The teachers' union contract limits mandatory professional development for teachers to three days per year. Gov. Rendell this year proposed state funding for eight additional days of professional development, which, if passed, may create an opportunity for the district to negotiate with the union to mandate additional time.

The Pittsburgh Public Schools also provides school-based professional development in the form of instructional coaches, who are expected to assist classroom teachers in implementing the district's core programs in reading and math. But there are varying reports about the effectiveness of the coaches. Moreover, the availability of math coaches is relatively limited, even though the math program is challenging for many teachers.

School-wide professional development efforts require common times for teachers to meet together at regular weekly or daily meetings. In Pittsburgh, however, common meeting times must be negotiated in each school and are not available in many of the district's schools.

Recruitment of highly qualified teachers is hampered by the fact that current teachers who will not return to their positions are not required to notify the district in a timely manner. The district, as a result, often struggles to fill positions after the best applicants have taken jobs elsewhere. The school district is also required to first consider candidates from an eligibility list which is structured to favor local candidates, rather than seeking the best candidates available, including those who are certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The quality of principals as well as teachers is also important to improving student outcomes. The quality of Pittsburgh's current principals varies widely and there is concern about the depth of the applicant pool for principal positions – jobs that are more demanding than ever. The small increase in salary given to principals does not attract many experienced teachers to the job. And the poor relations between board and administration may further reduce the number of applicants for principal positions.

The Commission believes that Pittsburgh’s teachers should be paid well and that high performance should be expected in return.

**The district should ensure that low-achieving students have access to the financial, staff, and programmatic resources they need to reach proficiency.**

- The district should provide financial incentives for highly qualified teachers and principals to serve low-achieving students.
- The district should modify its site-based budgeting system to include teacher salaries so that its most challenged schools and students are not assigned less-qualified teachers.
- The district should move forward with plans to offer more extended-day and extended-year programs for students who are not proficient in reading and math. Programs offered in the schools by community organizations should be carefully integrated with the district’s instructional programs.
- Programs should be initiated that support innovative parent and community development activities emphasizing educational excellence.

The district is taking steps in the right direction to raise the proficiency of low-achieving students. An extended-year program is available to K-3 children performing at basic or below basic levels of proficiency. In addition, many schools in the district currently offer extended-day programs. But the content of those programs varies from school to school.

Such programs should be expanded and closely coordinated with the district’s school-day instructional initiatives. In addition, the district should undertake family outreach efforts to ensure that students who need the help these programs offer actually attend the programs.

The school district’s staffing policies do not currently support low-achieving children. The district does not offer incentives for high-performing teachers and principals to serve in schools with large numbers of low-achieving students. In fact, policies in the Pittsburgh Public Schools have encouraged conditions in which the best and most-experienced teachers are more likely to work in schools serving high-achieving and middle-income students, while low-income, minority, and under-achieving students are more likely to be taught by lower-paid, less-experienced teachers without master’s degrees.<sup>2</sup> The district’s site-based budgeting policy assumes that every teacher is paid the average salary rather than calculating the teacher’s actual salary. Senior teachers have more opportunities to transfer to “desirable” schools. The district should extend its system of student-based budgeting to include actual salaries so that this inequity is eliminated.

**The district should ensure that all schools operate as safe, well-regulated environments for teaching**

### and learning.

Parents and teachers in many schools complain that behavior problems are interfering with teaching and learning. Discipline is managed effectively in some schools, but is a serious problem in others.

A comprehensive school discipline strategy should:

- Define a clear discipline policy that is well publicized and consistently enforced.
- Create additional alternative schools or placements so that difficult and disruptive students are given the structure and support they need.
- Include mandatory professional development in behavior management to all teachers and principals using a proven provider.
- Include the climate of the school as an evaluation measure of the principal.

The district has a behavior policy that specifies two levels of infractions and potential punishments for those infractions. The appropriate punishment is left to the discretion of the teacher and the principal. The policy is interpreted inconsistently at the school level.

New teachers are given two days of professional development on behavior management techniques as part of the induction program provided by the union. Experienced teachers have no required training in behavior management.

### **The community should ensure the availability of high-quality early education programs for all pre-school children, either operated by the district or in close partnership with the district.**

Outside providers of early care and education should work with the district to coordinate the educational content of their programs. In addition, the district should explore the possibility of expanding its state funding for early childhood.

Children vary widely in the knowledge and skills they have when they arrive in kindergarten. Research provides substantial evidence that high-quality early education helps prepare all children for the academic work they will encounter when they arrive in school and improves children's chances of succeeding in school and later in life. The district operates several pre-school programs, including federal Head Start programs. Many other programs in the city do not fall under school district authority. Public funding for early childhood services has historically been very limited. Recently, however, the governor proposed substantial new funding for pre-school programs.

(See "Mission, Priorities & Process" starting on page 11 of this report for details of the Student Performance, Accountability and Standards Committee and how it went about its work of investigating issues related to student achievement, assessing the information, and drafting recommendations).

1. Boards that Make a Difference, John Carver. 1990.

2. This inequity is convincingly demonstrated by a recent analysis called "Poverty, Race, Resources, Results in the Pittsburgh Public Schools" conducted for ACORN by the National Center for Schools and Communities, Fordham University.



# In Conclusion

The Pittsburgh Public Schools reach deep into the pockets of city taxpayers. High costs and high taxes are easier to accept when they are the price of excellence. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Heavy taxpayer investment has not brought excellence to the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Instead, the city's public schools bring home an alarmingly poor report card. When half or more of the students cannot read or do math at grade level, no other conclusion is reasonable.

The Mayor's Commission on Public Education was convened in response to a crisis in school district leadership and governance. The Commission's findings — the substandard student outcomes, high taxes, neglectful leadership and ineffective leadership — can no longer be tolerated. The opportunity to steer the schools onto a course of reform, higher expectations, and better outcomes is at hand.

Other cities have grown weary of poorly performing schools and have acted decisively to reform them. An important lesson learned from their experiences is that **significant improvement is only realized when the community rallies behind a school reform agenda that is clear, well-understood, and widely supported. It takes everyone – schools, families, and community – to improve achievement in the classroom.**

Pittsburgh is no exception. Only broad, sustained community support for a bold agenda of reform will succeed in bringing fundamental change to the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

The Commission is confident its recommendations represent the best course available to the city for promoting excellence in the classroom, responsibility in the board room, and equal opportunity for all students, regardless of race, family income or the school they attend.

Excellence in the public schools is vital to the future of Pittsburgh. Excellent schools strengthen neighborhoods. Excellent schools attract families to the city and convince those already living here to stay. Excellent schools produce creative and responsible citizens, and a strong and nimble workforce.

**Excellence can be achieved in Pittsburgh, but only with the political, financial, and moral support of the community. It is the hope of the Commission that its recommendations and the civic energy it took to craft them will inspire the sustained community support necessary to reform the Pittsburgh Public Schools in fundamental ways and, in doing so, brighten the prospects of the city's children and the city itself.**



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# Portrait of the School District

## **Pittsburgh Public Schools**

The Pittsburgh Public Schools is the largest school district in Allegheny County serving over 35,000 students in 93 schools. The district encompasses both the City of Pittsburgh and the Borough of Mount Oliver. The district has 57 elementary schools, 18 middle schools, 11 secondary schools and 7 special schools.

Assignments to elementary, middle and secondary schools are based on the address of the child's legal residence. The PPS also offers admittance to what are called Magnet schools. These schools often offer a more specialized curriculum than the standard programs offered at neighborhood assigned schools. Magnet schools provide an opportunity for the district to achieve racial balance through voluntary enrollment. Admission is based on availability of space and racial balance as well as the individual needs and interests of the students who apply.

Children are eligible for kindergarten if they reach five years old by September 1.

The PPS offers Special Education Programs that help children with special needs achieve like mainstreaming, sending children to educational centers, offering special classes a few times a week and sending specialized instructors directly to the child's home.

The PPS also offers a Gifted Education Program for those students with outstanding intellectual abilities. Students may attend the Pittsburgh Gifted Center once a week from second grade to eighth grade and advance on to the Centers for Advanced Studies during high school.

The district also offers a number of other services like Title 1 supportive services, extended day programs, transportation, food services, health services and extracurricular activities.

## **What Pittsburgh Looks Like: Mapping the Statistics**

The Commission determined that it would be helpful to gather data about the City for analysis and as a way to discover patterns throughout the district. Maps were also constructed using the data we collected to help us better understand patterns and trends. All of the maps were developed by the City of Pittsburgh Department of City Planning and statistics are from the 2000 and 1990 Census.

## **Population**

The population of the school district, according to the PPS website in June 2003, is 35,147. 58.18% of the students are African American, 39.61% are white, 1.49% are Asian, .59% are Hispanic and .14% of the population is other.

Compared to the City, which had a population of 334,563 according to the 2000 Census, 27.12% of the population is African American, 67.63% are white, 2.75% are Asian, 1.32% are Hispanic and .88% are other.

### **Change in Population 1990 to 2000**

The majority of neighborhoods in Pittsburgh lost population from 1990 to 2000. The neighborhoods that lost more than 20% of their population were Allegheny Center, Allegheny West, Arlington Heights, Fairywood, Homewood South, Larimer, Middle Hill, Spring Garden, St. Clair Village and Terrace Village. The neighborhoods that saw an increase in over 20% were the Bluff, Chateau, Downtown, and the South Shore.

### **School Aged Children**

According to the 2000 Census, there are 63,792 school aged children in the City of Pittsburgh with school aged being 5 years old to 19 years old.

The neighborhoods with more than 40% of households with school aged children were Arlington Heights, Bedford Dwellings, California Kirkbride, East Hills, Fairywood, Garfield, Northview Heights, and St. Clair Village. Almost all of these neighborhoods have a Housing Authority presence.

### **Change in School Aged Children Population 1990 to 2000**

Over half of neighborhoods in Pittsburgh witnessed decreases in population of school aged children, most losing between 1% and 25%. Only eight neighborhoods lost more than 25% of school aged children population. They were Arlington Heights, Fairywood, Hays, Ridgemont, South Oakland, South Side Flats, Spring Garden and Terrace Village. Nine neighborhoods population increased by over 25%. They were the Bluff, Chartiers City, Crawford Roberts, Glen Hazel, the Golden Triangle, Regent Square, South Shore, the Strip District and West Oakland. (School age children in this instance was, according to the census, children between the ages of 5 and 18.)

### **Income**

According to 2000 Census data, the median household income for Pittsburgh is \$28,588 and of those for whom poverty level is determined, 20.38% of the population is considered to be below the poverty level.

The neighborhoods that have median incomes below \$19,000 are Allegheny Center, Arlington Heights, Bedford Dwellings, Bluff, portions of Central Lawrenceville, Central Oakland, Crawford Roberts, East Allegheny, East Hills, parts of East Liberty, Fairywood, Fineview, Glen Hazel, parts of Garfield, parts of Homewood North and South, Larimer, Lincoln-Lemington-Belmar, North Oakland, Northview Heights, St. Clair Village, and Terrace Village.

Neighborhoods that have median incomes above \$60,000 are parts of Highland Park, Point Breeze, Regent Square, most of Squirrel Hill North, and Swisshelm Park.

For the school district, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Education for the years 2001-02, 60.3% of the student population is considered low income. Low income is defined by being eligible for free or reduced lunches. This is based on family income at percents of poverty income. Eligibility for free lunches is based on being 138% of the poverty level and reduced lunches are given to those between 138% and 185% of the poverty level.

## **Public and Private Schools**

In the year 2000, according to the Census, 50,034 children were enrolled in kindergarten, elementary, middle and high schools. Of the 50,034 children, 39,548 were in public schools, meaning 79% of children in K-12 go to the public schools and 21% attend private schools.

Broken down by neighborhood, over 90% of children attend public schools from the following places:

Allegheny West	Homewood South
Arlington	Homewood West
Arlington Heights*	Knoxville
Bedford Dwellings*	Manchester
Beltzhoover	Middle Hill
Bon Air	Northview Heights*
California Kirkbride Perry South	
Central Northside	Ridgemont*
East Allegheny	South Shore
East Carnegie	Spring Garden
East Hills	St. Clair*
Esplen	Terrace Village*
Fairywood	West End
Friendship	West Oakland
Garfield*	
Glen Hazel*	
Homewood North*	

Of these neighborhoods, 9 have large Housing Authority communities. These are noted with an asterisk.

The neighborhoods with less than 50% of their children in public school are noted below.

Bloomfield	Shadyside
Duquesne Heights	Squirrel Hill North
North Shore	Squirrel Hill South
Point Breeze	Summer Hill

A complete listing of each neighborhood and its attendance rates are attached.

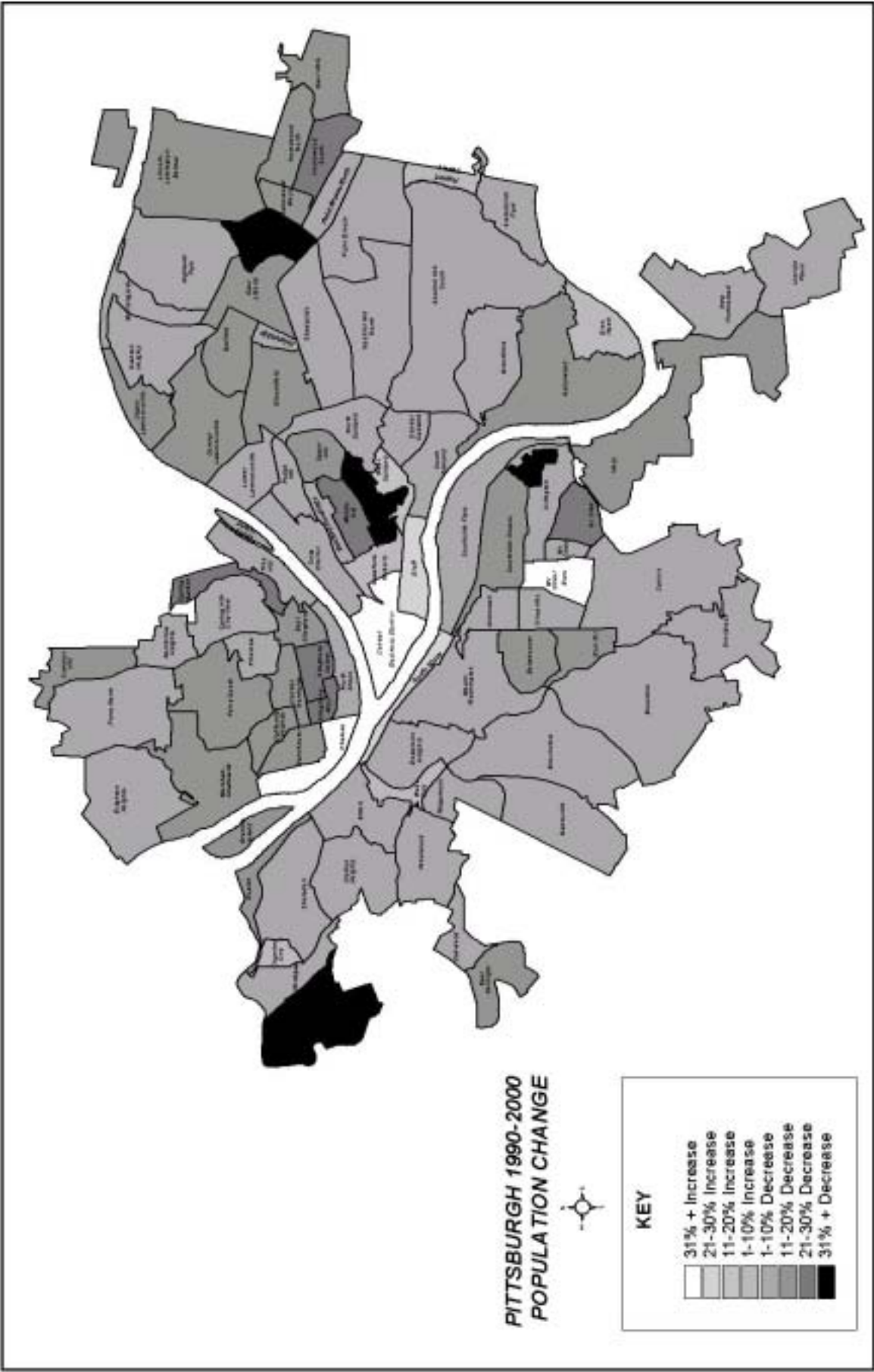
# Public and Private School Attendance by Neighborhood

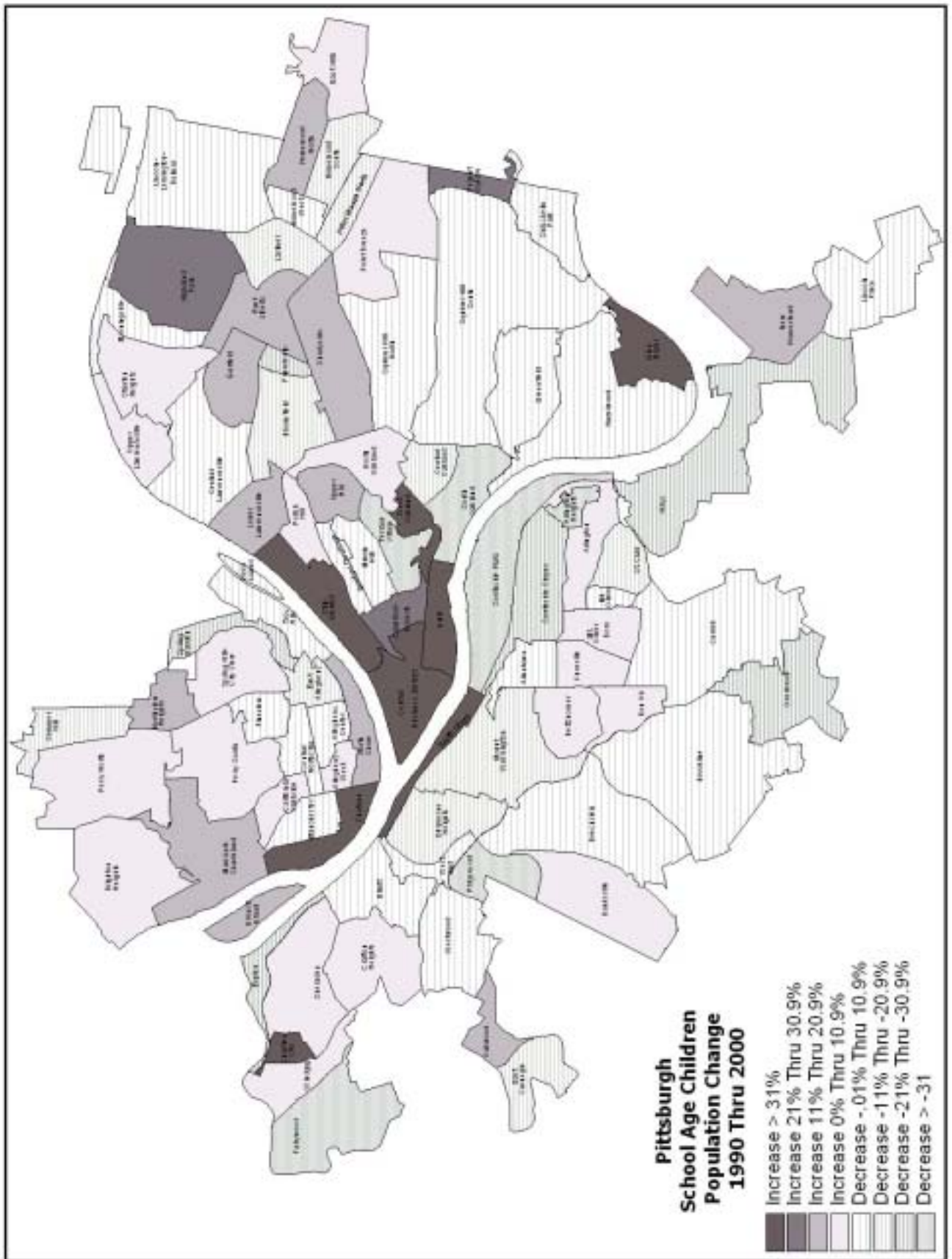
	<b>Total School Aged Children</b>	<b>Total Public</b>	<b>%</b>
North Shore	0	0	0.0
Squirrel Hill North	1105	415	37.6
Shadyside	688	268	39.0
Summer Hill	106	46	43.4
Bloomfield	941	431	45.8
Point Breeze	956	455	47.6
Duquesne Heights	321	153	47.7
Squirrel Hill South	1758	871	49.5
Windgap	203	107	52.7
Morningside	530	304	57.4
North Oakland	74	44	59.5
CBD	226	136	60.2
Banksville	403	249	61.8
Troy Hill	405	261	64.4
Brighton Heights	1396	921	66.0
New Homestead	133	88	66.2
Regent Square	153	104	68.0
Lincoln Place	620	422	68.1
Central Oakland	138	94	68.1
Westwood	317	216	68.1
Allegheny Center	19	13	68.4
Highland Park	1089	752	69.1
Southside Flats	299	219	73.2
Brookline	2121	1557	73.4
Crafton Heights	792	587	74.1
Perry North	871	646	74.2
Polish Hill	210	157	74.8
Central Lawrenceville	580	435	75.0
Greenfield	949	714	75.2
Stanton Heights	822	621	75.5
Hays	46	35	76.1
Swisshelm Park	216	168	77.8
Oakwood	179	141	78.8
Hazelwood	1025	809	78.9
Sheraden	1307	1034	79.1
Overbrook	545	433	79.4
Spring Hill/City View	609	485	79.6
Elliott	532	427	80.3
Mount Washington	1163	945	81.3
Southside Slopes	579	472	81.5
East Liberty	1240	1021	82.3

	<b>Total School Aged Children</b>	<b>Total Public</b>	<b>%</b>
Carrick	1650	1365	82.7
Chartiers City	141	117	83.0
Crawford Roberts	473	395	83.5
Beechview	1386	1159	83.6
Mount Oliver	110	92	83.6
Marshall-Shadeland	1086	914	84.2
Bluff	49	42	85.7
Strip District	56	48	85.7
Upper Lawrenceville	460	398	86.5
South Oakland	233	202	86.7
Point Breeze North	372	323	86.8
Fineview	315	274	87.0
Lower Lawrenceville	445	388	87.2
Allentown	709	629	88.7
Upper Hill	481	428	89.0
Larimer	623	557	89.4
Lincoln Lemington Belmar	1072	959	89.5
Knoxville	961	876	91.2
Fairywood	312	285	91.3
Perry South	1346	1232	91.5
West Oakland	276	254	92.0
East Hills	1030	951	92.3
Arlington	383	356	93.0
Bon Air	144	134	93.1
St. Clair	506	472	93.3
Homewood North	1189	1111	93.4
Friendship	108	101	93.5
Garfield	1617	1531	94.7
East Allegheny	429	409	95.3
Terrace Village	770	736	95.6
Homewood South	715	689	96.4
Middle Hill	370	358	96.8
Beltzhoover	691	675	97.7
Northview Heights	1095	1076	98.3
Bedford Dwellings	544	539	99.1
Manchester	506	502	99.2
Allegheny West	39	39	100.0
Arlington Heights	79	79	100.0
California Kirkbride	252	252	100.0
Central Northside	567	567	100.0
East Carnegie	73	73	100.0
Esplen	78	78	100.0
Glen Hazel	132	132	100.0
Homewood West	188	188	100.0
Ridgemont	61	61	100.0
South Shore	6	6	100.0
Spring Garden	200	200	100.0
West End	40	40	100.0
Total City and Mount Oliver	50,034	39,548	79.0

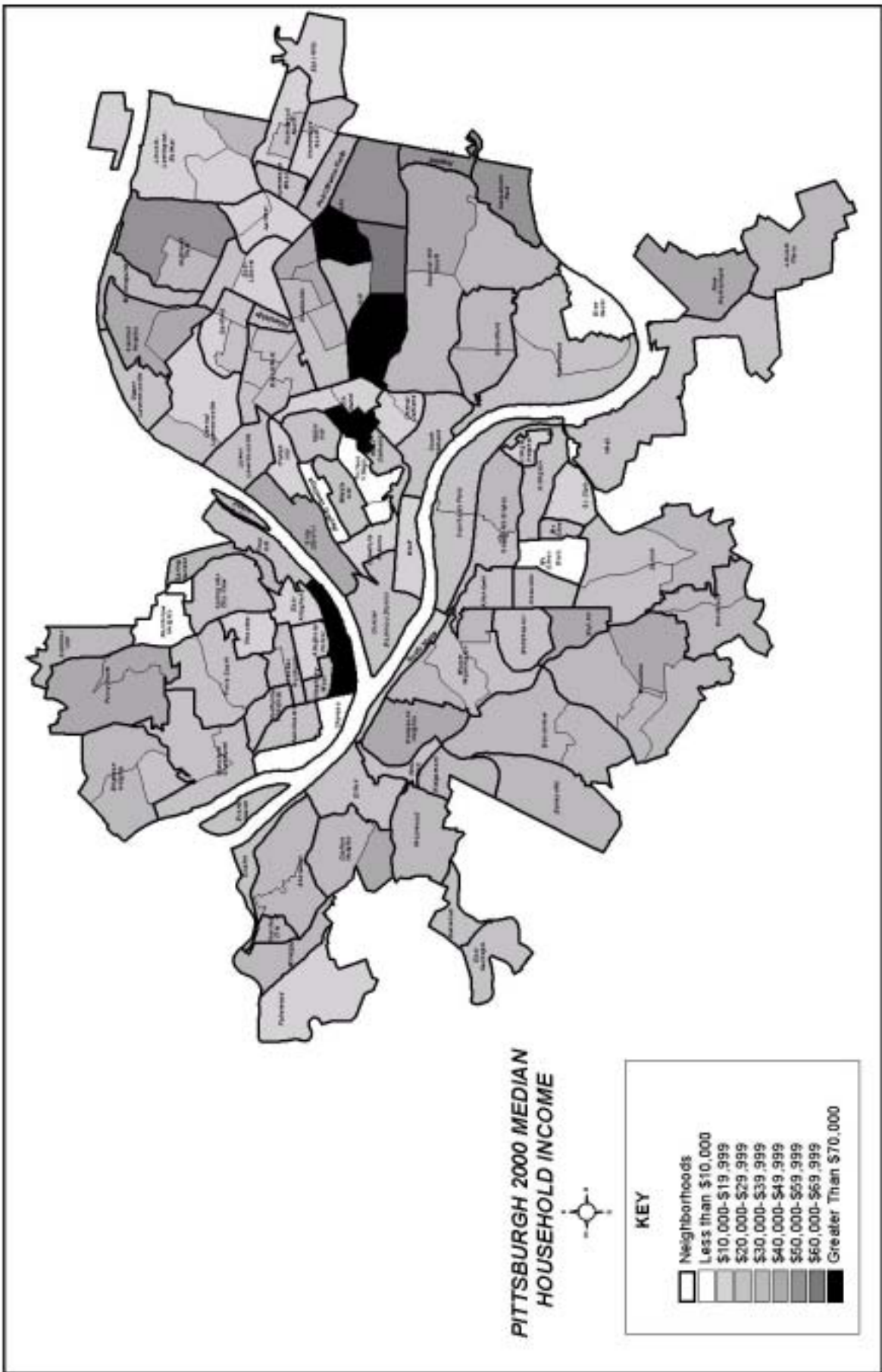
**PITTSBURGH SCHOOL DISTRICTS  
& NEIGHBORHOODS**

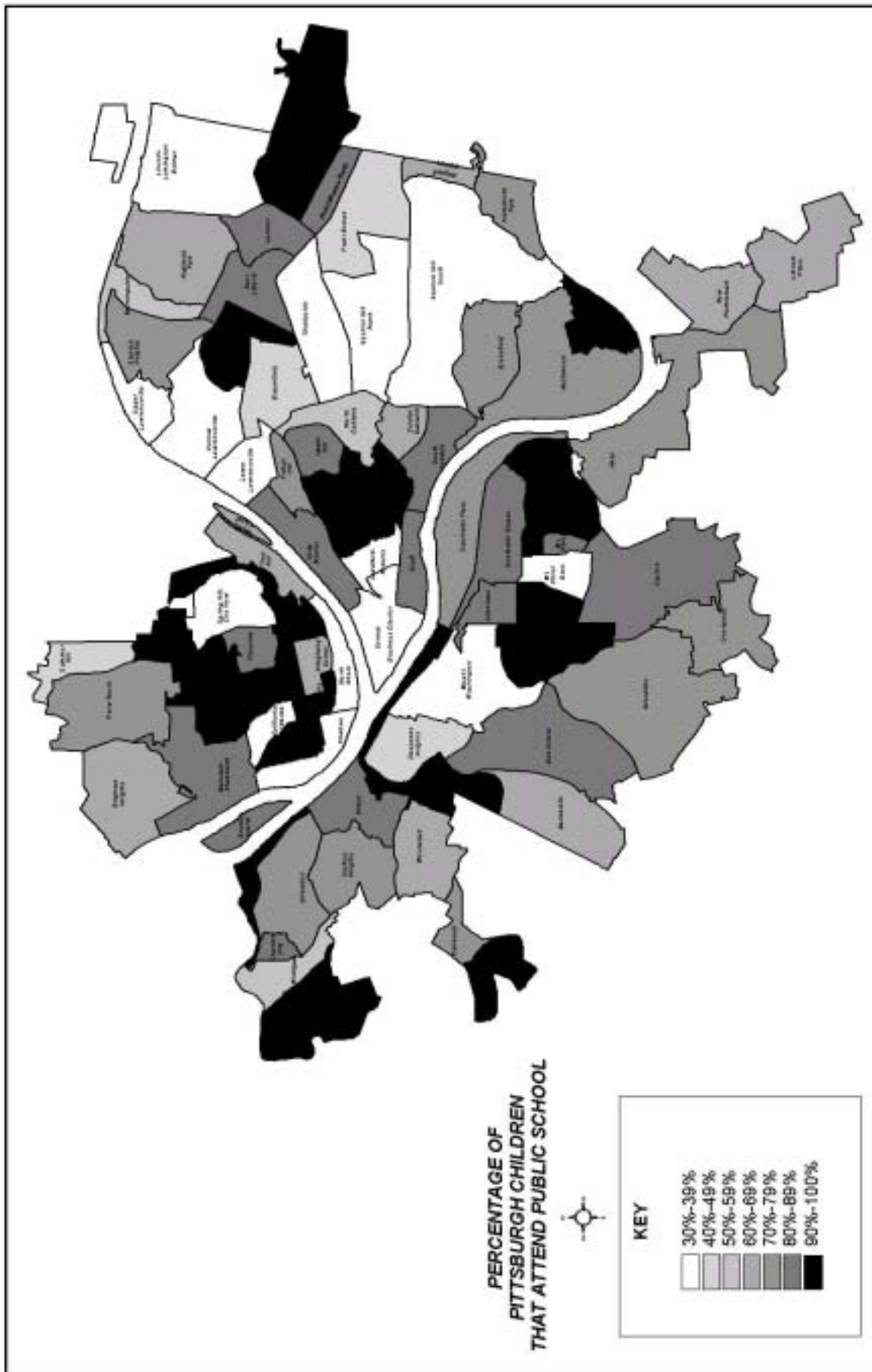


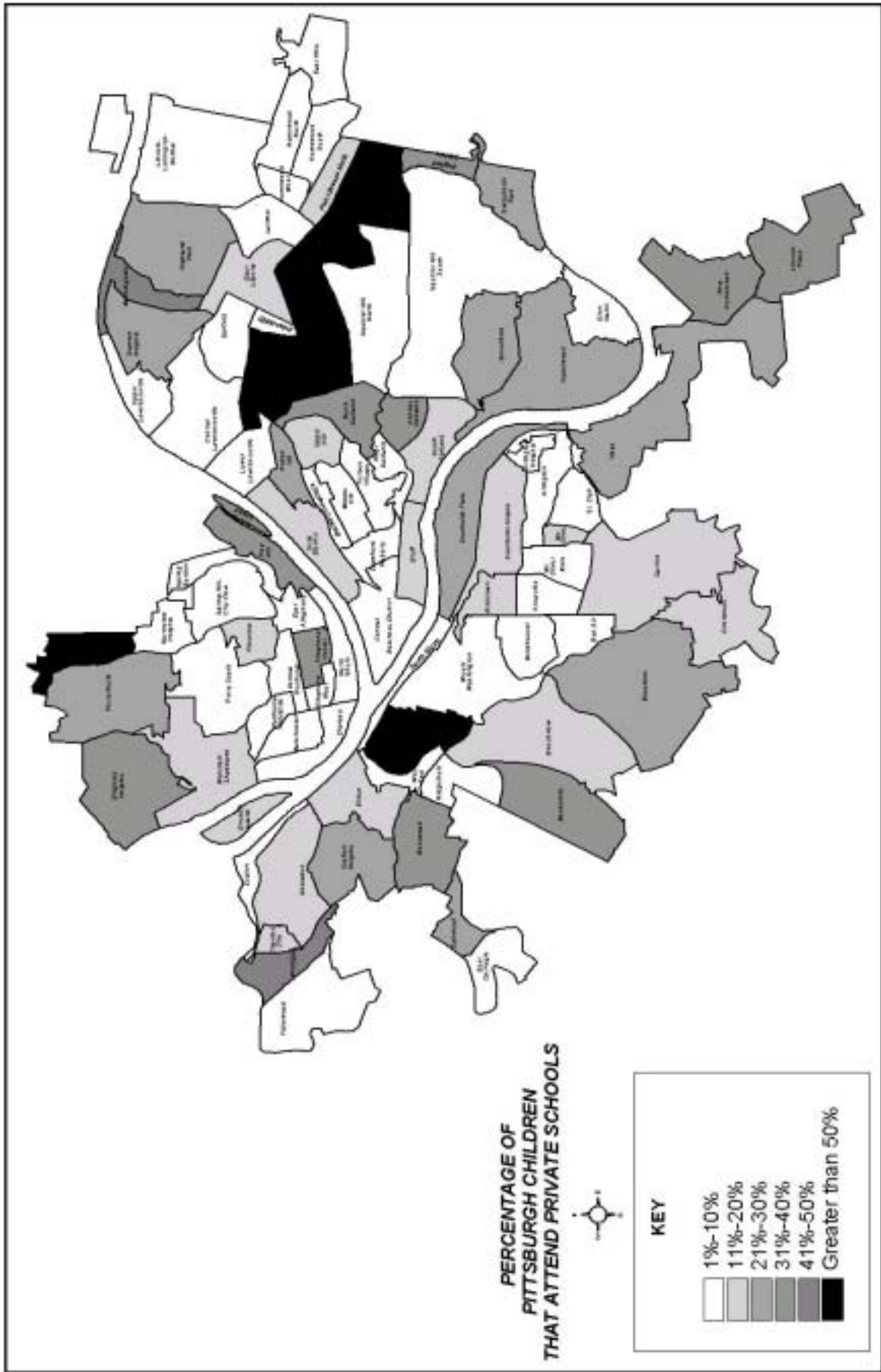














# Surveys

At the beginning of January, 2003, the Mayor's Commission on Public Education began its community outreach process in earnest, holding over 30 meetings with different types of community groups. The Commission began to collect e-mail addresses from those interested in learning more about the Commission's work from both the website and community meetings. The e-mail list grew to over 300 names. We invited these people to take surveys throughout the winter and spring and advertised the surveys on our homepage. The surveys were meant to open the conversation about public education to the community and allow a way for community members to have input. Their main purpose was to spur conversation, put important issues on the table and to gather input. They are not scientifically based. For this reason, we have decided against publishing the results of the surveys. The survey questions are listed below.

## **Survey #1 - Improving Education**

January 16, 2003

Total Responses: 128

### **1. Which of the following ideas would you approve of Pittsburgh schools adopting to improve education. Choose three.**

Make parent and community involvement a key component of the education experience

Hold all students to high academic standards

Invest more in teacher professional development

Turn every school into a "magnet"

Concentrate on reading and math

Involve the business community in changing schools

Other

### **2. Which of the same choices would you consider to be the MOST important? Choose one.**

Make parent and community involvement a key component of the education experience

Hold all students to high academic standards

Invest more in teacher professional development

Turn every school into a "magnet"

Concentrate on reading and math

Involve the business community in changing schools

Other

## **Survey #2 - Education and the Region's Vitality**

January 28, 2003

Total Responses: 117

### **What is the role of public education in our region's vitality?**

Ensuring an educated workforce to compete regionally and globally

Offering children diverse experiences

Keeping taxes low

Providing all of our children with a world class education

Changing the perception of Pittsburgh

Attracting and keeping young families

## **Survey #3 - Leading the Way**

February 4, 2003

Total Responses: 94

### **1. The School Board should lead the way in making sure students in all Pittsburgh schools have access to an excellent education.**

Strongly agree

Agree

Somewhat agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't care

### **2. The Superintendent should lead the way in making sure students in all Pittsburgh schools have access to an excellent education.**

Strongly agree

Agree

Somewhat agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't care

### **3. The Mayor should lead the way in making sure students in all Pittsburgh schools have access to an excellent education.**

Strongly agree

Agree

Somewhat agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't care

**4. The Community should lead the way in making sure students in all Pittsburgh schools have access to an excellent education.**

Strongly agree

Agree

Somewhat agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't care

**Survey #4 - Choosing the Pittsburgh Public Schools**

February 11, 2003

Total Responses: 84

**1. If you were making the choice between sending your children to Pittsburgh Public Schools or an alternative, what would Pittsburgh's schools have to offer to decide in their favor? (Choose three.)**

High test scores

Safe environment

Access to extracurricular activities

Highly qualified teachers

A school in my neighborhood

Offers advanced placement (AP) tests and courses

Diversity in student make-up

Small class sizes

Enhanced arts and music courses and activities

Other

**2. Of the above, which is the MOST IMPORTANT criteria in making your choice? (Choose one.)**

High test scores

Safe environment

Access to extracurricular activities

Highly qualified teachers

A school in my neighborhood

Offers advanced placement (AP) tests and courses

Diversity in student make-up

Small class sizes

Enhanced arts and music courses and activities

Other

## **Survey #5 - Involving Community**

February 20, 2003

Total Responses: 79

### **1. Community groups should play a greater role in making our schools better.**

Strongly agree

Agree

Somewhat agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

### **2. The School District should initiate partnerships with community groups and other public agencies to involve them with the schools.**

Strongly agree

Agree

Somewhat agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

### **3. From what you know, what activities are not currently being offered by the district that children need?**

Homework help

Book groups

After school meals

Sporting and recreational activities

Arts and music classes

Mentoring

Other

### **4. Is there a role that community groups and other institutions can play in offering these programs?**

Community groups should sponsor programs in their own neighborhoods

Social service agencies and other organizations should offer programs city wide

Businesses should help to pay for programs

Senior citizens should volunteer to staff programs

Other

### **5. What institutions should be involved?**

Local government

YMCA

United Way

Local community groups

Churches and synagogues

Businesses

Universities

Other

**6. What are some other ways the community can be involved in public education?**

**7. Do you know of any good examples of community/school partnerships?**

**8. What else would you like us to know?**

### **Survey #6 - The Role of our Elected Officials**

March 4, 2003

Total Responses: 86

#### **1. What should the role be for our STATE elected officials?**

Strongly agree - Agree - Somewhat agree - Disagree - Strongly disagree - N/A

Expand funding for after school programs

Expand funding for early education initiatives

Hold schools accountable for quality performance

Know about education issues

Take over troubled school districts

Withhold funding for low performing districts

Fight for more education funding from the state

Fight for more education funding from Congress

#### **2. What should the role be for our LOCAL elected officials?**

Strongly agree - Agree - Somewhat agree - Disagree - Strongly disagree - N/A

Expand funding for after school programs

Expand funding for early education initiatives

Hold schools accountable for quality performance

Know about education issues

Take over troubled school districts

Withhold funding for low performing districts

Fight for more education funding from the state

Fight for more education funding from Congress

#### **3. What else would you like us to know?**

### **Survey #7 - The Role of the School Board and Superintendent**

March 13, 2003

Total Responses: 60

#### **1. What is the role of the School Board?**

Strongly agree - Agree - Somewhat agree - Disagree - Strongly disagree - N/A

Expand funding for after school programs

Expand funding for early education initiatives

Hold themselves accountable for quality performance

Know about education issues

Work to find more funding from the state

Work to find more funding from the Federal government  
Develop a common vision for the district  
Hire the superintendent  
Hire personnel  
Provide community leadership on educational issues  
Develop partnerships with community groups, businesses, universities, etc. to expand school services  
Make periodic reports to the public as to the status of the school district  
Direct all matters pertaining to instruction and curriculum

**2. What is the role of the Superintendent?**

Strongly agree - Agree - Somewhat agree - Disagree - Strongly disagree - N/A

Expand funding for after school programs  
Expand funding for early education initiatives  
Hold themselves accountable for quality performance  
Know about education issues  
Work to find more funding from the state  
Work to find more funding from the Federal government  
Develop a common vision for the district  
Hire personnel  
Provide community leadership on educational issues  
Develop partnerships with community groups, businesses, universities, etc. to expand school services  
Make periodic reports to the public as to the status of the school district  
Direct all matters pertaining to instruction and curriculum

**3. What else would you like for us to know?**

**4. Are you a resident of the City of Pittsburgh?**

**5. Do you have a child in the Pittsburgh Public Schools?**

**6. What is your age?**

**7. In which neighborhood do you live?**

**8. Who is your school board representative?**

**9. How did you find out about our surveys?**

## **Survey #8 - Sharing Information**

March 27, 2003

Total Responses: 48

**1. Do you know what the overall goals and achievement standards are for the district?**

Yes

No

**2. Do you know what programs and strategies the PPS uses to accomplish its goals?**

Yes

No

**3. Do you know how the district decides on the goals for schools and students?**

Yes

No

**4. Do you know that the PPS has a Strategic Plan?**

Yes, I was involved in creating the Strategic Plan

Yes, I know about it

No

**5. How important is it to you to be familiar with the PPS' Strategic Plan?**

Very Important

Important

Not Important

Don't care

**6. As a parent or individual, how do you receive information about things like how your kids are doing, how individual schools are doing, and how the district is doing compared to other neighboring districts? (Choose as many as are appropriate.)**

The PPS directly

Newspaper

TV news programs

PTA, PTO and PSCC involvement

The PPS website

The Pennsylvania Department of Education

I don't know where to get that information

Other

**7. Do you think it is important for the PPS to distribute this information on a regular basis?**

Yes

No

**8. Why is it important to have access to this information?**

It builds interest and support for the school system

It builds public accountability

As a public entity, the PPS should share information on a consistent basis  
It's important for prospective parents  
It's not important  
Other

**9. What would be the best way to receive this information?**

The PPS directly  
Newspaper  
TV news programs  
PTA, PTO and PSCC involvement  
The PPS website  
The Pennsylvania Department of Education  
I don't know where to get that information  
Other

**10. What else should we know?**

**Survey #9 - Expectations and Testing**

May 5, 2003

Total Responses: 36

**1. Do you think that having guidelines for what students are expected to learn and know helps improve academic performance?**

Yes  
No  
I don't know

**2. Before students are awarded a high school diploma, would you want the school district to require students to:**

Pass a basic skills test in reading, writing and math  
Pass a more challenging test showing they have learned at higher levels  
Requiring students to pass a test is a bad idea  
I don't know

**3. When it comes to giving students in the elementary grades standardized tests, which of the following do you agree with?**

Testing students at a young age is good because struggling students can be identified and helped  
Testing students at a young age is wrong because it puts too much pressure on them  
I don't know

**4. Standardized test scores are a good way to spot struggling students who need tutoring or summer school.**

Strongly agree

Agree

Somewhat agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

**5. What else would you like us to know?**



# Voting Trends

The staff of the Commission researched the voting trends in Pittsburgh in the past ten years. We looked at the Primary and General elections for the following years: 2001, 1999, 1997, 1995 and 1993 and the Primary for 2003. In each of these years there was a school board election and either a race for Mayor or for County Executive or County Commissioner. Our findings follow.

## **Population and Registered Voters**

According to the 2000 census, the total population of the City of Pittsburgh is 334,563. Of that, 264,745 people are 18 years or older and therefore eligible to vote. 90%, or 239,274 people were registered to vote in the 2001 Primary Election. For the Primary election in May of 2003, the number of registered voters fell to 207,906, meaning only 79% of the population eligible to vote are actually registered.

## **Low Voter Turnout**

In almost all of the Primary elections we looked at, voter turnout in general was low. In 2003 it was 24.5%, in 2001 it was 32%, in 1999 it was 30%. The number increases slightly in 1997 to 39.8%, goes back down to 31.7% in 1995 and increases in the 1993 Primary to 47.3%.

The General election turnouts are higher, with the exception of the turnout in 2001 which was only 24.7%. In 1999, the turnout was 35%, in 1997 it was 45.4%, in 1995 it was 42.3% and back up to 47.4% in 1993.

## **School Board Elections**

Less people vote for school board than vote for either Mayor or County Executive. While a very small amount of people actually show up to vote, 10-15% fewer people vote for school board. For instance, in the 2001 Primary election, 30% of voters cast a ballot in the mayor's race while only 12% voted in the District 1 school board election.

In some school board elections, most notably the 1993 general elections, low numbers cast votes for school board. For instance, in 1993, only 5% of voters cast a vote for school board in District 5. District 7 also had a low turnout that year, only garnering 8% of voters. While these two examples are in the extreme, we found that turnout rates in the teens and twenty percentages are not at all uncommon in school board races.

\* Note – Where District #7 is shown, results for Mount Oliver were added in. For the City Totals, Mount Oliver was removed.



## **Mayor's Commission on Public Education School Funding and Financial Management Committee Sources**

### Enrollments

The enrollment projections that have been used in the committee's report were released by the Pennsylvania Department of Education in May 2002. The projected enrollment for 2002-2003 was 37,612. These projections are the basis of the rightsizing savings estimates in the report.

In June 2003, after the committee had completed its work, the Department of Education released new projections. These are based on more recent data from the school district. The actual enrollment at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year was 35,146. This enrollment figure is based on more accurate reporting procedures that were adopted by the district. The new projections, based on this actual enrollment for 2002-2003, foresee a greater decline in enrollments than was foreseen in 2002. These lower projections strengthen the need for a sustained effort to rightsize and reduce both costs and revenues.

Finally, the district has prepared its own building-by-building projections for the 2003-2004 school year. The district staff believes that enrollments will decline to 34,411 for 2003-2004. These detailed building-by-building projections are used in the report in the section describing the average enrollments at the elementary, middle and secondary levels.

The enrollment projections for other districts in Allegheny County used in this report were released by the Pennsylvania Department of Education in May 2002.

### Building capacities

The district provided information on building capacities. This information is published annually as part of the introductory material in the district's budgets.

### Costs and revenues

The current cost and revenue information and the capital cost information are from the district's approved budget for the 2003 fiscal year.

This includes the budgeted building operating and maintenance costs, and the average compensation costs for teachers and other staff used in the rightsizing savings estimates.

The district provided historical information on costs and revenues, including state reimbursements for special education.

The Education Policy and Leadership Center provided background information on state reimbursements in general.

The Treasurer for the city and the school district provided the information on the extra revenues generated by the district's recent tax increases.

## Fund balances

The fund balance figure for year-end 2001 is from the annual financial audit for the district. The district provided the un-audited figure for 2002. The district also provided information on the district's property tax refund reserve. This reserve accounts for the excess property tax revenues received by the district after the countywide reassessment.

## Salaries

The building-by-building average professional salary information is based on W-2 reporting for the 2002 personal income tax year.

## Comparisons

The comparisons between the school district and other districts in the state are based on 2000-2001 information provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. This information is based on the Annual Financial Reports prepared by each district in the state following state mandated guidelines.

This state information is the basis of the per-pupil cost, pupil-teacher ratio, and pupil-staff ratio information used in the report.

The comparisons between the school district and other urban districts with similar enrollments in other states are based on 1998-1999 information provided in the US Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics *Common Core of Data*. This information is based on state reporting following federally mandated guidelines.

The national salary information is based on the 2000-2001 *Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends* prepared by the American Federation of Teachers. The survey covers the 100 largest districts in the country.

## Cost of Excess Capacity

The current cost of excess capacity, more than \$10 million, is based on the school district's planned building closings for 2001-2002. At that time, the district estimated that the staff, operating, and maintenance savings from the closing of 13 schools would have been \$11,327,000. Not all of the schools were closed; some of the closed schools were re-opened.

# Financial Statistics Presentation

These statistics were compiled by the Pennsylvania Economy League in order to brief the three committees that make up the Commission.

## School Funding and Financial Management Committee

February 24, 2003

### Budgets

- General fund - \$485.7 million
- Other operating funds - \$80 million net of transfers (Supplemental, Food Service and Special Education)
- Capital - \$69.4 million in 2002
- December 31, 2001 undesignated fund balance of \$71.8 million - 15 % of spending

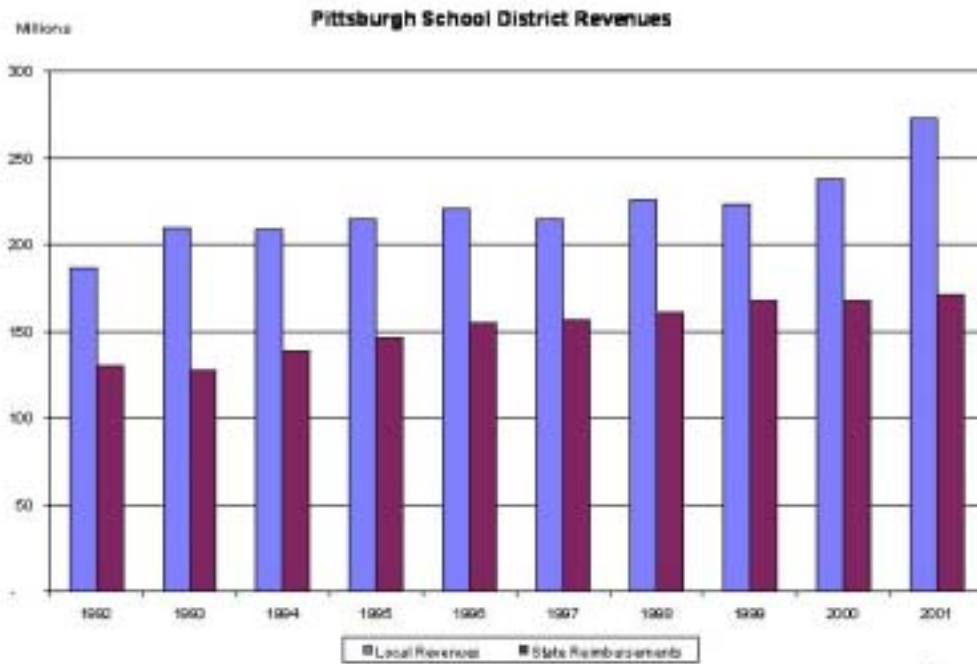
## 2002 Expenditures General Fund Appropriation

- Regular education            \$164 million
- Special education            59 million
- Administration                62 million
- Physical plant                 46 million
- Student transportation       27 million
- Debt service                  46 million
- Charter schools                7 million

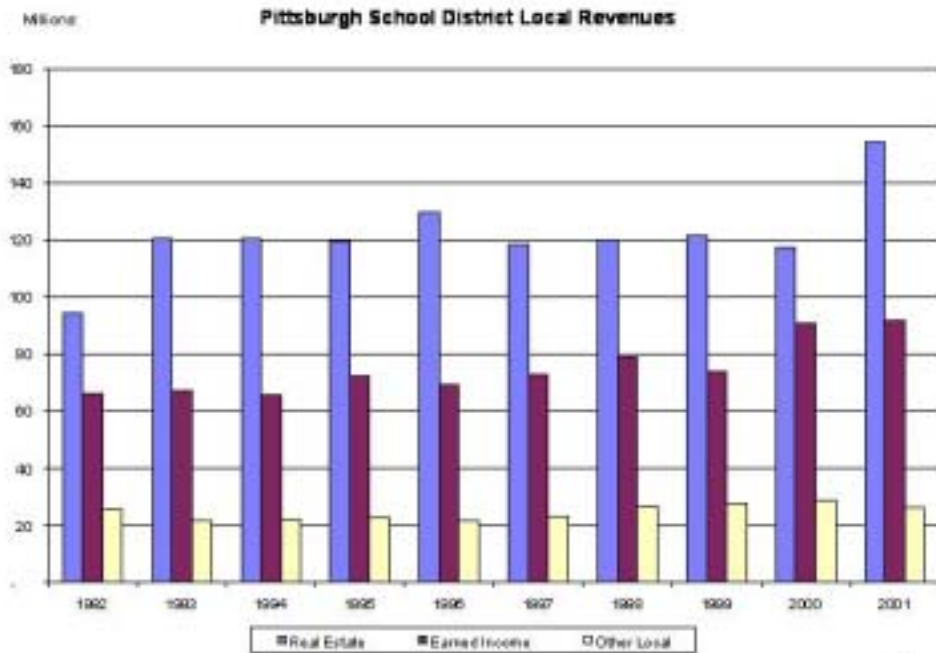
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## 2001 Tax Increases

- **Increased Rates**
  - Property by 2 mills to 13.92 mills
  - Earned income by 0.125% to 2.0%
  - Deed transfer by 0.25% to 1.0%
- **Increased Revenues**
  - \$35,943,071 in 2001
  - \$33,268,175 in 2002

Source: Treasurer for City and School District

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### Total Per-Pupil Costs Pennsylvania Districts 2000-2001

	Pittsburgh as Cost	Percent of Median
Pittsburgh Cost	11,651	100%
Median for all Pennsylvania Districts	8,381	139
Median for 50 Largest Districts	8,961	130
Median for 10 Largest Districts	8,599	135
Median for Allegheny Co. Districts	9,751	119
Median for Low-Income Districts	9,139	127

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**Per-Pupil Costs by Sub-Function  
Philadelphia and Pittsburgh  
2000-2001**

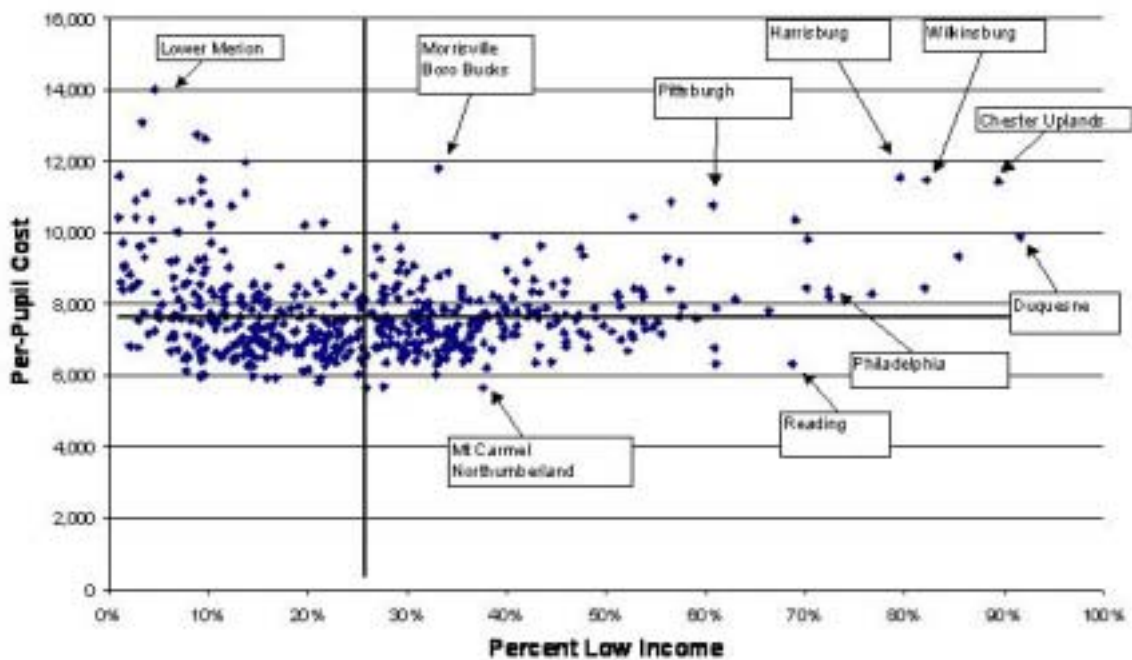
	Philadelphia	Pittsburgh
Total Expenditures	\$8,781	\$11,651
Current Expenditures	8,400	10,778
Instruction	5,391	6,692
Regular Education	4,078	4,087
Special Education	908	1,631
Vocational Education	268	361
Other Instructional	129	515
Support Services	2,723	3,959
Pupil Personnel Services	145	338
Support Instructional Staff	247	437
Support Administration	615	1,054
Principal Services	379	655
Support Pupil Health	127	84
Support Business	81	135
Plant Operation and Maintenance	1,151	1,173
Student Transportation	186	398
Support Central	171	139
Other Support	0	-
Non-Instructional Services	286	127
Facilities Acquisition, Construction and Improvement	-	34
Other Uses	381	839
Debt Service	381	839

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## Cost Drivers

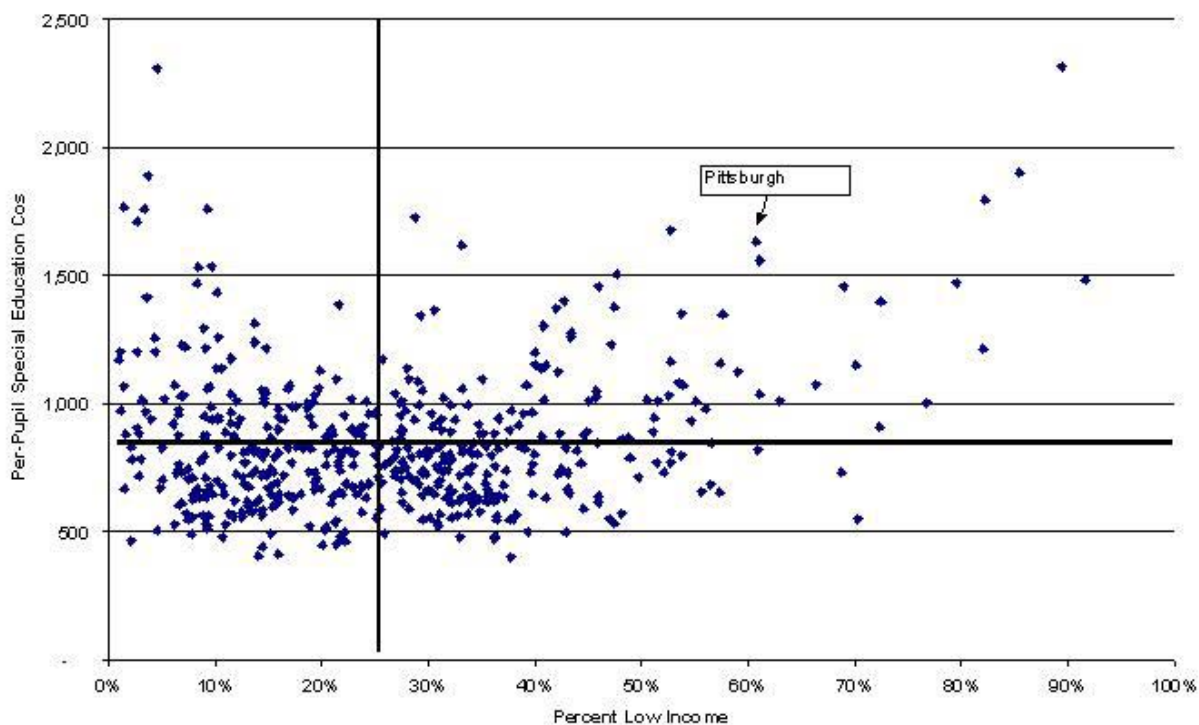
- Low-income students
- Special education
- Teacher salaries
- Administrative costs
- Number of facilities & Grade structure

**Per-Pupil Total Cost and Percent Low Income  
All Districts**



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**Special Education Costs and Percent Low Income**

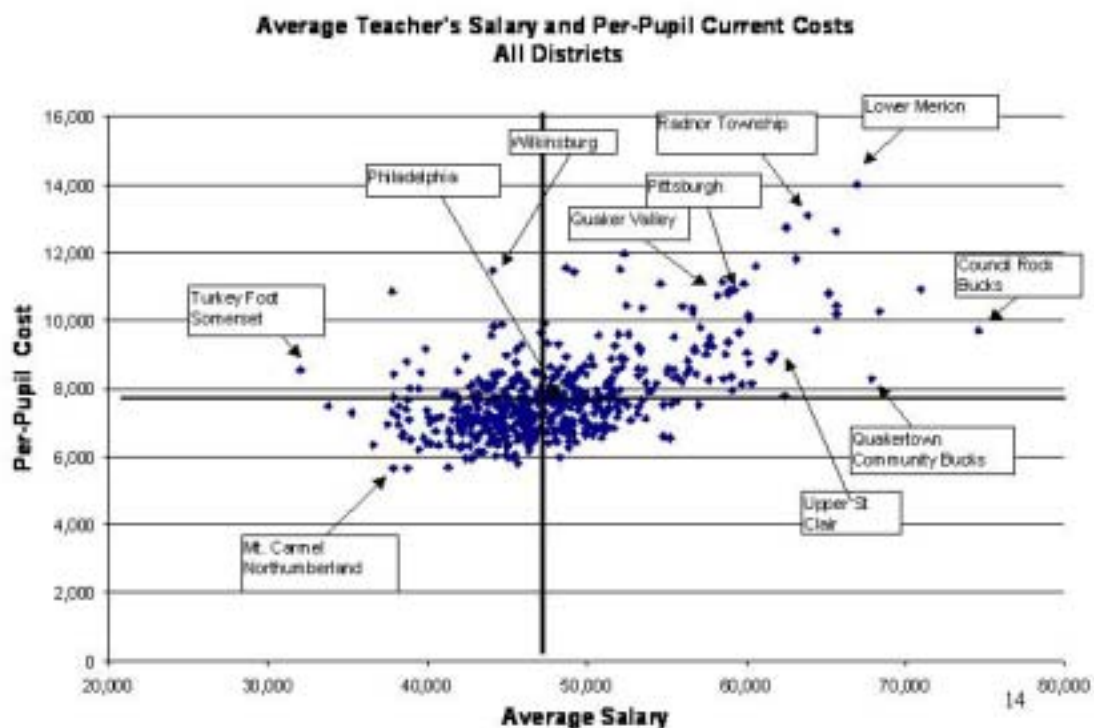


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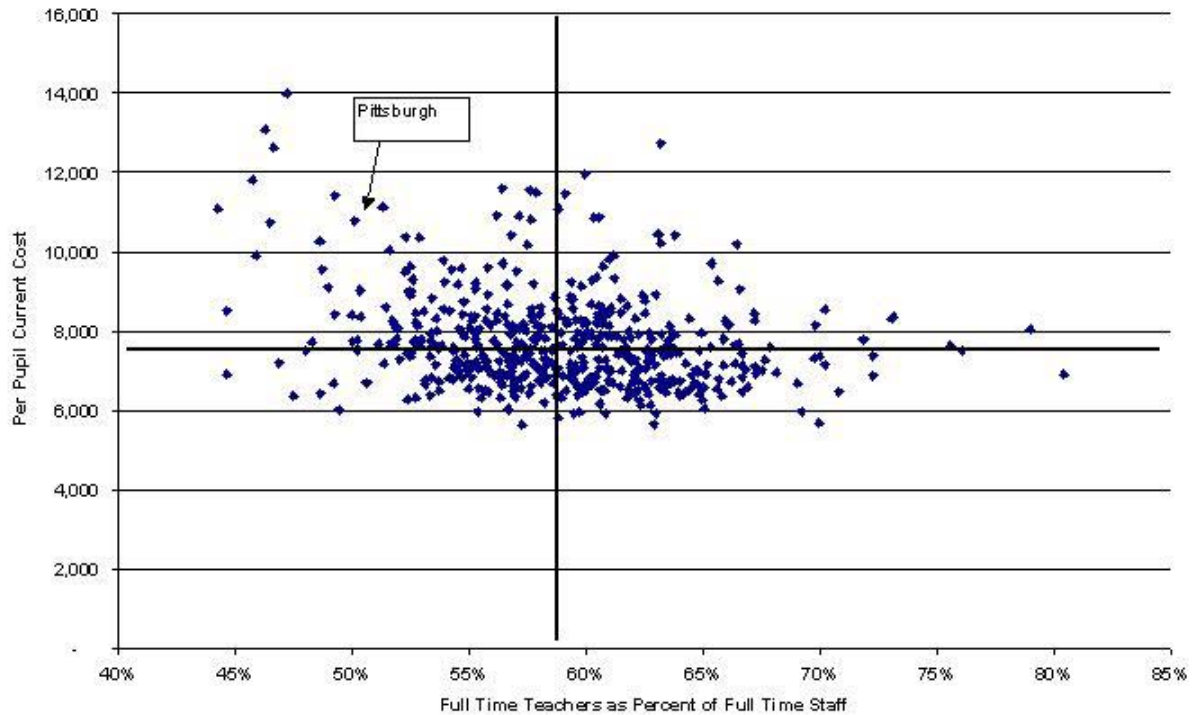
## 2000- 2001 Special Education Costs Allegheny County Districts

	Number	Percent of Enrollment	Per-Pupil Cost
Median	539	18%	\$5,359
Pittsburgh	10,163	26%	6,190
Pittsburgh as Percent of Median		145%	115%

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### Current Costs and Full Time Teachers as Percent of Full Time Staff



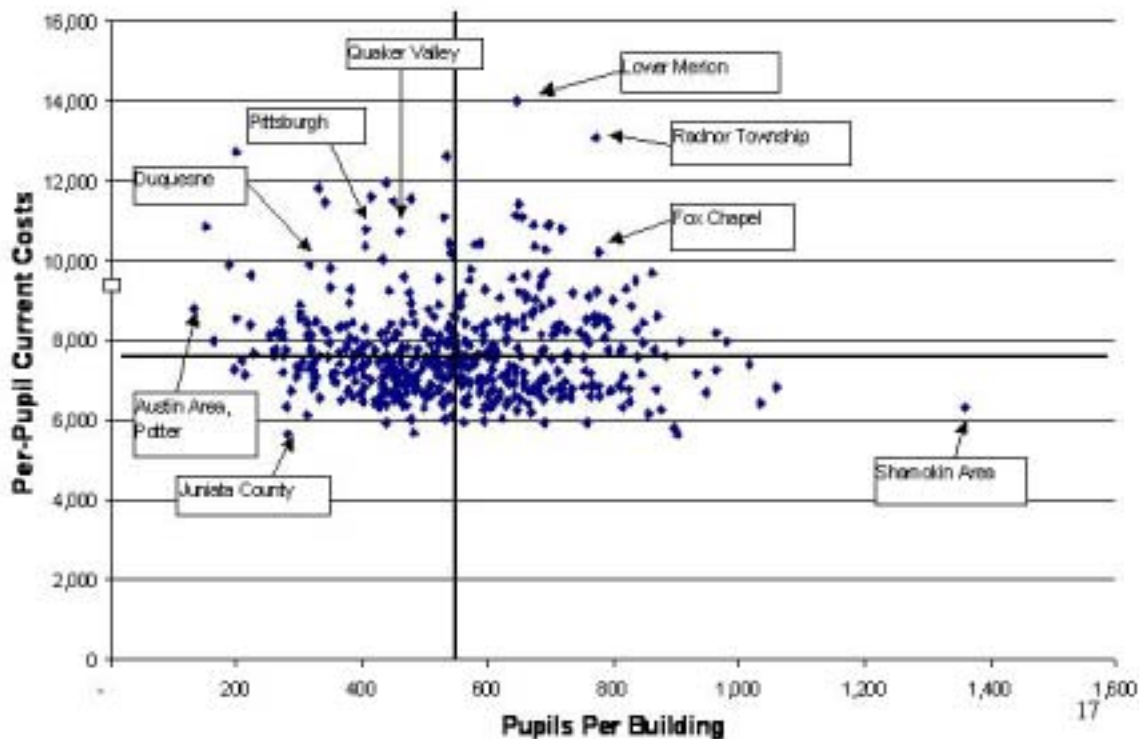
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## Students and Facilities

- 92 schools
- 49,844 student capacity
- 37,612 enrollment
  - 316 per elementary school
  - 398 per middle school
  - 928 per secondary school
- Projected 2011 enrollment – 27,993
  - Average decline – 962 per year

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**Current Costs Per Pupil and Pupils Per Building  
2000-2001**



## Grade Structures

- Elementary - Middle - Secondary
- Magnet schools
- Plus six K – 8 elementary schools
- Increases number of choices for students
- Increases building and transportation costs

## Students and Staff

- 2001
  - 37,612 enrollment
  - 5,394 teachers and staff
  - Pupil to Staff Ratio of 7 to 1
- 2011
  - 27,993
  - 4,015 teachers and staff – 1,375 fewer
  - Ratio of 7 to 1

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## Issues

- State Funding
- Budget Year and Budget Calendar
- Facilities
- Fund Balance
- Right Sizing

20

## State Funding

- Basic, special and vocational education
- Originally based on costs
- Since mid-90s, funding has been based on prior year's funding
- State share has dropped from 55 to 36%
- Other funding for transportation, debt service and pensions

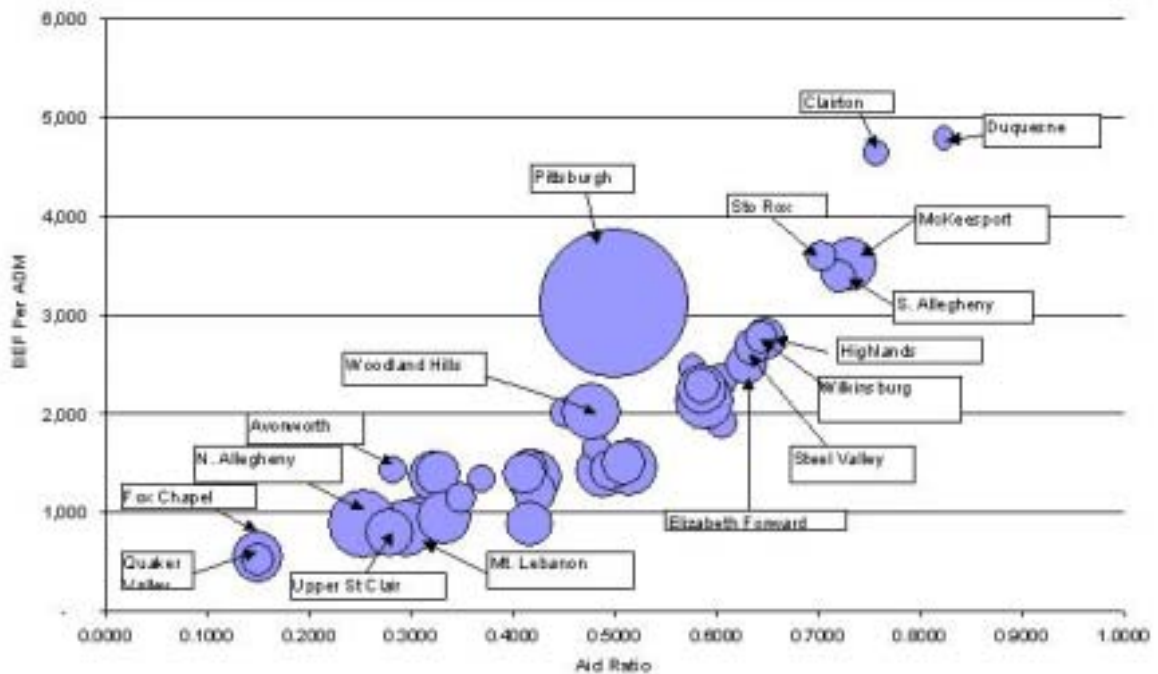
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## Funding Reform Efforts

- Special education based on actual enrollments and costs
- Charter school reimbursements – now 30% of last year's costs
- Full day kindergarten
- Early childhood and pre-school education

22

**Aid Ratio and 2002-2003 Basic Education Funding Per Average Daily Membership And Enrollments**



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## Budget Year

### School Districts on a July-June Fiscal Year

Academic year same as fiscal year

Matches state's fiscal year

### Pittsburgh on January-December Fiscal Year

Mid-year cost-cutting and program changes

Budget passed after programs set for year

State aid for second half of year not known

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# Budget Calendar

- **In past, planning began 11 months ahead of time**
  - Board involvement
  - Principals able to have input
- **Now board-administration budget discussions do not begin until fall**

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# Questions

- **How to spend down the balance**
  - Give back in form of tax cut
  - One-time capital expenditure to avoid debt
  - Special expenditures to improve performance
- **How to close buildings - criteria**
  - Last attempt based on small size

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## **Pittsburgh School District Teacher Salary Rankings 2000-2001**

The American Federation of Teachers prepares and publishes an annual *Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends*. The last issue is based on 2000-2001 data. The AFT uses survey data collected by the Civilian Management Service, Wage and Salary Division of the Department of Defense. (Congress has mandated that overseas civilian teachers in the Department of Defense School System be paid salaries comparable to teachers in cities of more than 100,000 residents.)

The AFT report provides an analysis of trends and specific information on the 100 largest districts in the country. Based on 1990 census data, Pittsburgh is 40<sup>th</sup> among these districts in population size.

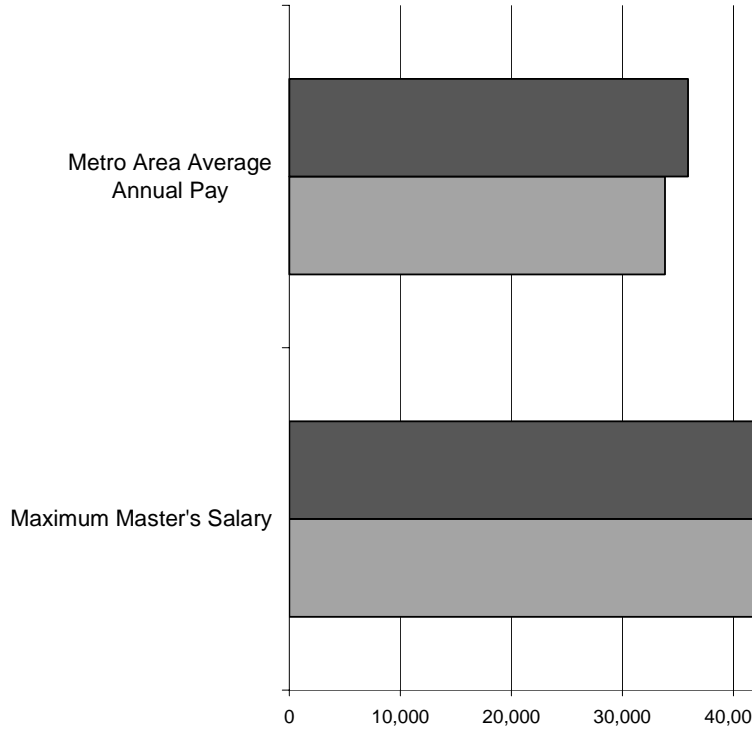
### **Findings for the 100 largest school districts**

The teacher salaries in the Pittsburgh school district are high when they are compared to the 100 largest districts in the country. This holds true even when adjustments are made for inter-city differences in costs of living, in metro area per-capita personal income and average pay, and in statewide average teacher pay

- Pittsburgh ranked first for the highest maximum salary adjusted for intercity differences in the cost of living at \$63,159. The average for the group was \$47,815. Philadelphia ranked 64<sup>th</sup> at \$45,418. (The cost-of-living adjustments were made using the American Chamber of Commerce Research Association, Intercity Cost-of-Living Index for 2001.)
- In Pittsburgh, it took 10 steps to reach the maximum salary. The average number of steps for the group was 18. Pittsburgh ranked fourth. In Philadelphia, it took 11 steps.
- Pittsburgh, in 2000-2001, had the 17<sup>th</sup> highest minimum salary for a teacher with a Bachelor's degree at \$34,300. The average for the group of 100 districts was \$30,400. Philadelphia ranked 39<sup>th</sup> at \$31,344.
- Pittsburgh had the fifth highest maximum salary for a teacher with a Master's degree at \$66,380. The average for the group was \$51,689. Philadelphia ranked 28<sup>th</sup> at \$55,274.
- Among 12 northeastern cities, Pittsburgh had the fourth highest Master's maximum salary. Only Yonkers, Jersey City and Newark had higher maximum salaries. Philadelphia ranked ninth.
- Pittsburgh ranked 10<sup>th</sup> for the maximum salary at \$67,980. The average for the group was \$57,542. Philadelphia ranked 24<sup>th</sup> at \$62,687.

- Pittsburgh ranked first for the average annual salary change from the Bachelor's minimum to the Master's maximum at \$3,208 per year. The average for the group was \$1,184. Philadelphia ranked 13<sup>th</sup> at \$2,175 per year.
- Pittsburgh had the fourth highest ratio between the Master's maximum salary and average annual pay for the metro area at 1.96. The maximum salary was \$66,380 and the average pay for the Pittsburgh metro area was \$33,837. The average ratio for the group was 1.44. Philadelphia ranked 62<sup>nd</sup> with a ratio of 1.41.
- Pittsburgh had the ninth highest ratio between the Master's maximum salary and the per-capita personal income for the metro area at 2.24. The per-capita personal income for the Pittsburgh metro area was \$29,587. The average ratio for the group was 1.73. Philadelphia ranked 48<sup>th</sup> with a ratio of 1.69.
- Pittsburgh had the eighteenth highest ratio between the Master's maximum salary and the average teacher salary for all districts in the state at 1.34. The Pennsylvania state average was \$49,528. The average ratio for the group was 1.19. Philadelphia ranked 78<sup>th</sup> with a ratio of 1.12.

**Teachers' Salaries and Metro Area Income and Pa  
100 Largest Districts 2001**



SCHOOL CLOSINGS/RE-OPENINGS  
SINCE 1980

School	Year Closed	Year Re-Opened	Present Status
Davis	1980	n/a	Sold
Larimer	1980	n/a	Sold
Lee	1980	n/a	Sold
Morningside	1980	1990	K-8 school
Morse	1980	n/a	Sold
Mount Oliver	1980	n/a	Borough Building
West Liberty	1980	1995	Elementary School
Wightman	1980	n/a	Sold
Latimer	1982	n/a	Sold
Halls Grove	1983	n/a	Sold
Schiller	1983	1984	Middle School
Fairywood (West Side)	1984	1990	Closed 2001
Mann	1984	1988	Elementary School
Boggs	1985	n/a	Board Offices
Holmes	1985	n/a	Sold
McCleary	1985	1993	Elementary School
Regent Square	1985	1988	Elementary School
Roosevelt	1985	1988	Elementary School
South Hills High	1985	n/a	Vacant
Spring Hill	1985	1992	Elementary School
Arlington Middle	2001	2002	Middle School
Bon Air	2001	2002	Elementary School
Gladstone	2001	n/a	Vacant
Spring Garden	2001	2002	Elementary School

**School district enrollment:**

- 1980-81: 45,907
- 2001-02: 37,612

**24 school closings since 1980:**

- 8 in 1980
- 1 in 1982
- 2 in 1983
- 
- 2 in 1984
- 7 in 1985
- 4 in 2001

**Of the 24 closings, 12 were re-opened:**

- 1 in 1983
- 1 in 1984
- 3 in 1988
- 2 in 1990 (*one has since re-closed*)
- 1 in 1992
- 1 in 1995
- 3 in 2002

**Of the 24 closings since 1980, 13 are closed today**



# Leadership and Governance

## School Board Governance Structures Around the Country

### By District Elections

**Houston Independent School District** – 9 members elected by district (MDRC Report)

**Taxing Authority: School Board**

**Miami** - The School Board of Miami-Dade County is comprised of nine members elected by the people. They serve four-year terms and are elected from individual single member districts on a staggered basis. Members annually elect their chair and vice-chair. The board moved from seven members to nine members, a result of a court order intended to ensure fair representation amongst Miami-Dade County's ethnic groups.

**Taxing Authority: School Board**

**Pittsburgh** – 9 by district

**Taxing Authority: School Board**

**Portland** - Portland Public Schools is guided by a seven-member Board of Education, which is responsible for the education of all children residing within the school district. Each Board member represents one of seven zones within the Portland Public Schools. Members are elected to zones by all voters living within the district's boundaries. Board members serve four-year terms without compensation and may be re-elected. Student concerns are represented by a one-year non-official voting position held by a high school student, who is selected by the Superintendent's Student Advisory Committee. The Board meets twice a month to consider, discuss and determine the directions Portland Public Schools will take in a range of areas. School Board members establish guidelines concerning organization, general policies, and major plans and procedures for the school district.

**Taxing Authority: School Board**

**San Diego** - The district's governing Board consists of five members, each elected to represent a particular region of the district.

**Taxing Authority: School Board asks the citizenry for a referendum vote**

**Seattle** - The Board of Directors for Seattle School District No. 1 is an elected body representing seven geographical regions, known as Districts, within the City of Seattle. The length of the term is four years.

**Taxing Authority: School Board DOES NOT have taxing authority. In Washington, school districts can put levies on the ballot to raise money for operating expenses (capped at 28% of the budget), capital expenses and technology. Levies must be approved by a 60% supermajority to pass.**

## **At Large Elections**

**Cincinnati** - The Board of Education is the elected body (seven members, at large) charged with the following responsibilities: establish educational goals; initiate and adopt policies; consider and pass upon the recommendations of the superintendent in the appointment or dismissal of certificated employees, salary schedules, or other personnel regulations, courses of study, selection of textbooks, or other matters pertaining to the welfare of the schools; select a superintendent; provide for the preparation and adoption of the annual budget; provide by the exercise of its taxing power the funds to finance the operation of the schools; make rules and regulations for the operation of the schools; appraise the effectiveness with which the schools are achieving the educational goals; solicit and weigh public opinion as it affects the schools, and inform the public concerning the progress and needs of the schools; evaluate the performance of the superintendent on an annual basis; and, evaluate the performance of the treasurer on an annual basis.

**Taxing Authority: School Board**

**Minneapolis** - The seven member at large school board is a policy-making body responsible for selecting the superintendent and overseeing the District's budget, curriculum, personnel and facilities. The school board is granted authority to carry out these duties by the State of Minnesota and the Minnesota Legislature. The Board of Education began using policy governance as a framework for its work in March 2001. Policy governance commits board members to work as a team to set goals for the district, monitor implementation and results, and provide greater outreach to parents and the community. To better engage the community, several board meetings each year will be held in schools. The board's intent is to provide the opportunity for a two-way dialogue with the community on specific policy issues.

**Taxing Authority: School Board**

**Sacramento City Unified School District** - Board of Education has eight members, seven of whom are elected at large and serve 4-year terms. An eighth member, selected from the high school Student Advisory Committee, serves for one year. The Superintendent of the school district is the ex-officio Secretary to the Board. *Mayor endorsed the latest slate of school board candidates.* (MDRC Report)

**Taxing Authority: Initiative (Referendum) voted on by citizens**

**St. Louis** - The St. Louis Board of Education is composed of members elected at large by the voters of the City of St. Louis. School Board members serve without compensation. When vacancies occur between elections, the Mayor appoints a replacement to serve until the next Board election. The Board selects a president, vice president and secretary each June.

**Taxing Authority: School Board**

## **Hybrid At Large/By District Elections**

**Atlanta** - The Atlanta Board of Education establishes and approves the policies that govern the Atlanta Public School system. The Board consists of nine members, representing six geographical districts and three “at-large” districts. One person is elected per district to represent the schools in a given district for a four-year term. Board members elect a president and vice president each year. The day-to-day administration of the school district is the responsibility of the Superintendent, who is appointed by the Board.

**Taxing Authority: School Board**

**Charlotte-Mecklenberg Schools** – 9 members, 6 by district and 3 at large (MDRC Report)

**Taxing Authority: County controls taxes**

**Denver** - There are seven members on the Denver Board of Education. Five are elected by voters within five districts; two are elected at-large by voters across the entire city. Board members’ terms are four years and are staggered so no more than three board members are elected in any one election. The Denver Board of Education is the policy-making body for the district. Its powers and duties are established in state law.

**Taxing Authority: Board can petition, but State controls taxes/Voted on by electorate**

**Kansas City, MO** – 9 members, 6 by district and 3 at large

**Taxing Authority: School Board**

**Milwaukee** - As established by law, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors consists of nine members: one member elected at large and eight members elected from numbered districts as determined by the Milwaukee Board of School Directors. The regular term of each member is four years and until their successors have been elected and qualified.

**Taxing Authority: The Milwaukee school board has the power to raise or lower property taxes on its own authority. It has no authority to raise income, sales or other taxes. The levy amount is communicated to the city council, which directs the city treasurer to collect it.**

**Tampa (Hillsboroug County)** – 7 members, 5 by district and 2 at large

**Taxing Authority: School Board raises property taxes, state sets a required millage and gives the option of a discretionary 2 millage increase which Tampa does use. No income taxes in Florida.**

## **Mayor Appointed**

**Cleveland** – Cleveland’s school governance structure was created in 1997 and took effect in 1998 with the appointment of the current Board of Education of the Cleveland Municipal School District. The Board consists of nine voting members by then-Mayor Michael R. White from a slate of nominees selected by a local nominating panel, established under state law. At least four of the nine members must have significant expertise in education, finance, or business management. Board members must be residents of the district, and at least one of the nine members must reside in a part of the District outside the City of Cleveland. State law provides that the presidents of the Cleveland State University and

Cuyahoga Community College serve as non-voting ex officio members of the Board. The mayor also appoints the school district's CEO. The mayor can fire the CEO only with the approval of the board.

**Taxing Authority:** Schools are paid for by a vote of Cleveland residents to increase their property taxes. The School District can put a levy on the ballot, and the residents decide if tax dollars will increase to pay for the District's operating funds. In addition, the District (with a majority vote by the school board) can also put a bond issue for facilities on the ballot. It is illegal to mix operating funds and bond levy dollars.

### **Mayor Appointed/Elected Hybrids**

**Oakland, CA** – Voters recently changed the number of school board members from 7 to 10 and allows the Mayor to appoint 3 members. The seven members are voted for by district. The Mayor originally wanted to appoint the entire school board but could not gain support for it.

**Taxing Authority: referendum/initiative**

**Washington, DC** – Created a hybrid nine-member board with four selected by the mayor, four elected from new geographic districts and the president elected in a city-wide referendum. A referendum will be held to decide on whether to renew this form of government.

**Taxing Authority: The School Board does not have taxing authority. The budget is approved by the Mayor, City Council and Congress.**

### **Mayor and State Appointments**

**Baltimore** – The mayor used to appoint school board members but lost the power in 1997. Now, the governor and mayor jointly appoint a nine member board of commissioners based on a nominating slate provided by the State Board of Education. Board members have to have expertise in either business, non-profit or government, knowledge of education or be a parent.

**Taxing Authority: Doesn't have taxing authority, called state and left message**

**Detroit** - The mayor appoints six members and the governor appoints one member. Schoolboard only chooses the superintendent, approves the superintendent's appointees, and approves the annual school improvement plans. The mayor has no other direct involvement with the schools.

**Taxing Authority: e-mailed**

**Philadelphia** – In 2000, voters approved a charter initiative enabling the mayor to appoint all school board members at one time. The mayor has appointed a person in his office to follow school policy and to work with the board-appointed CEO. In 2001, Mayor Street negotiated to have more state involvement with the school improvement and governance.

Now, they have a five member School Reform Commission with three members appointed by the governor and two by the mayor.

**Taxing Authority: City Council and the Mayor**

### **Strong Mayor**

**Boston** – Mayoral appointment of the board began in 1991. The school board has only an advisory role and decisions are made by the superintendent and mayor. A 1996 referendum retained the mayor appointed system but spoke out against the lack of public accessibility the system had. The current mayor has stated that he and the superintendent will attend to their public function more readily.

**Taxing Authority: City has control of taxes for school district**

**Chicago** – In 1995, the state gave the mayor more power effectively turning the public education system into a department of the city government. The school board nominating committee was eliminated and replaced with a corporate style board.

**Taxing Authority: Chicago Board of Education has raised taxes five years in a row since Mayor Daley's takeover, including this year with a proposed \$54million dollar hike. City taxes are separate and have been held constant. (Chicago Sun-Times, Dec 19, 2002)**

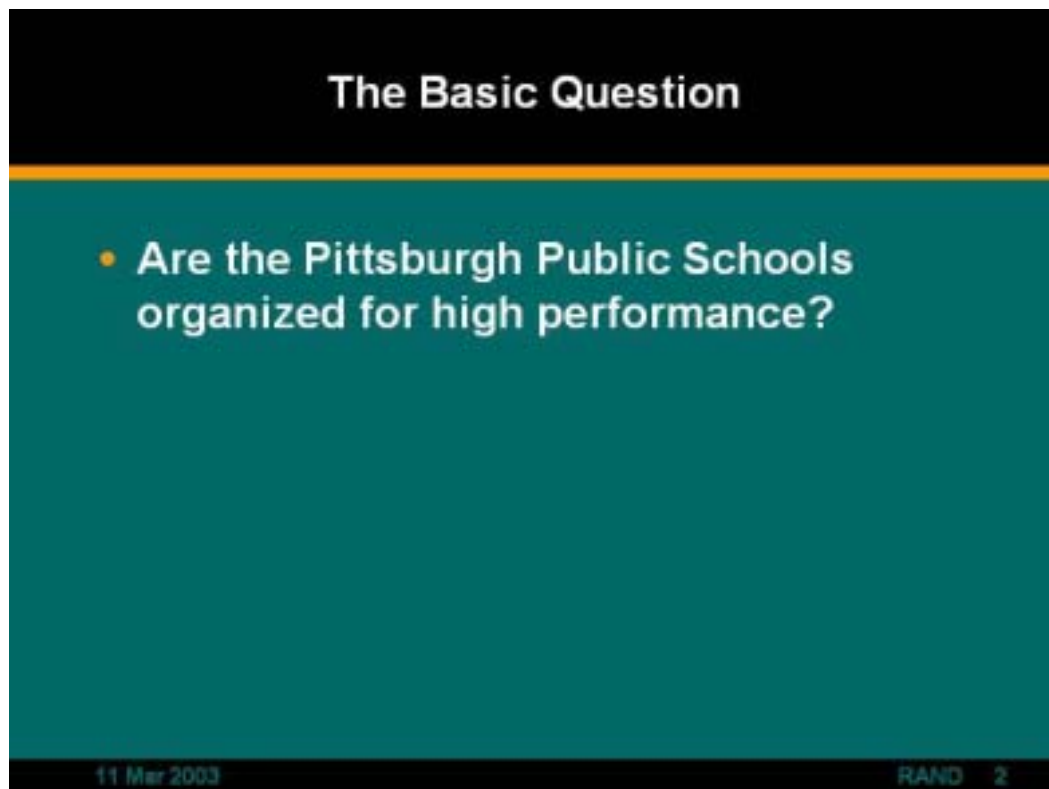
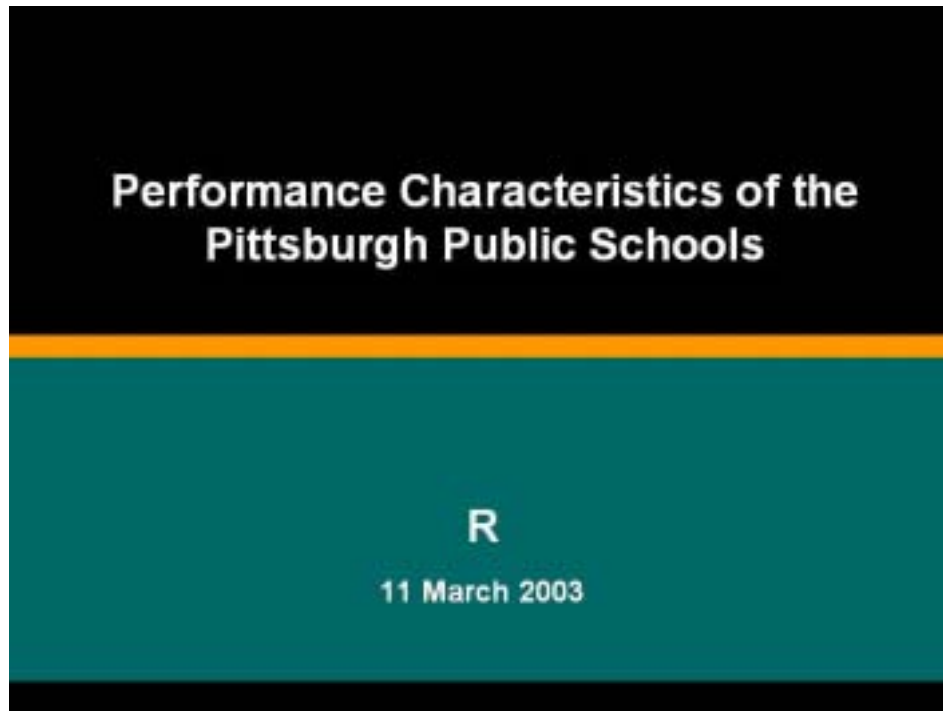
**New York City** – Board was abolished and a commissioner of education reports directly to the mayor.

**Taxing Authority: The City.**

According to the *Fiscal Year 2000-2001 School Based Expenditure Reports*, Fiscal Year 2001 Revenue Sources for the Dept of Education are as follows: City Funds 46.2%, State Funds 43.5%, Federal Funds 10.0%, Private Funds 0.3%.

# Performance Characteristics

The following presentation was prepared for the Mayor's Commission on Public Education as part of the technical assistance provided by the RAND Corporation. It has not been through a formal RAND review or editing. It was presented to the Student Performance, Standards and Accountability Committee on March 11, 2003.



## Data Collection Included Interviews Around the District

- Districtwide interviews included
  - Superintendent
  - Chief Academic Officer
  - Chief of Staff
  - Executive directors
  - Directors of reading and math
  - PD, HR, Communications
  - PFT officials
- Teacher and principal interviews at 11 schools
  - Five elementaries including one K-8
  - Three middle schools
  - Three high schools
  - Neighborhood schools and magnets
  - Geographically and demographically representative

11 Mar 2003

RAND 3

## A Note of Caution: Raw Test Scores Don't Tell the Whole Story

- Variation among schools within the district is wide
  - In terms of leadership, collegiality, teacher experience and motivation, as well as student characteristics
- Test scores are not fully correlated with high-performance practices
- We met many competent staff who understand the demands of high performance and appear to be headed in the right direction

11 Mar 2003

RAND 4

## Key Concerns

- Governance problems affect the schools, undermining educational initiatives
- Assessment system cannot yet routinely provide information that is useful for both evaluative and instructional purposes
- PPS does not maximize the capacity and use of human resources
- Discipline problems adversely affect instruction in some schools
- Resource allocation inconsistently supports the goal of promoting proficiency for all students

11 Mar 2003

RAND 5

## Briefing Outline

- ➔ • Governance
- Assessment and accountability
- Human resources
- Discipline and student behavior
- Resource allocation

11 Mar 2003

RAND 6

# Governance Problems Undermine Education

- Board-supt bickering undermines district-wide focus on achievement
- Implementation of instructional programs suffers
  - Principals and teachers doubt the commitment to current curricula, particularly in math
  - Those who are resistant can drag their feet: “this too shall pass”
- Board micromanagement causes educational problems
  - Assessments inconsistent with curricula
  - High-quality job applicants scared away

11 Mar 2003

RAND 7

# Briefing Outline

- Governance
- ➔ • Assessment and accountability
- Human resources
- Discipline and student behavior
- Resource allocation

11 Mar 2003

RAND 8

## Assessment System Serves Instructional Purposes, but Requires Integration

- PSSA and other standardized tests provide feedback too late for instructional use
- District's standards-based and informal assessments are more useful to teachers
  - At some schools, teachers appear to be well-attuned to proficiency levels of individual students
- Integration of data in new electronic system should provide timely, diagnostic information for principals and teachers
  - Training will be critical

11 Mar 2003

RAND 9

## Assessment System is Inadequate for Evaluation and Accountability

- Student achievement should be key measure for evaluation of programs, schools, and personnel
- Raw proficiency levels are appropriate goals, but inappropriate for evaluation
  - Students enter with different levels of preparation
- Assessment system must follow growth of individual students over time
- New data system will make this possible in theory
  - If assessments are appropriate
  - If district develops analytic capacity

11 Mar 2003

RAND 10

## Briefing Outline

- Governance
- Assessment and accountability
- ➔ • Human resources
- Discipline and student behavior
- Resource allocation

11 Mar 2003

RAND 11

## PPS Is Improving Its Development of Instructional Staff, but Obstacles Remain

- Recruitment is problematic
  - Happens too late
  - Does not seek excellence
- Some indications of improvement in assignment and PD
  - Transfer policies give principals limited control
  - PD is widely available, but of variable quality
- Removing incompetent staff is difficult and rarely happens

11 Mar 2003

RAND 12

## PPS Does Not Maximize the Capacity and Use of Its Principals

- Board interference in principal assignment has declined, but recruitment is hampered by board troubles
- Pool of internal candidates is dwindling
  - Job is getting harder
  - Rewards are insufficient
- Some principals regard PD as useless

11 Mar 2003

RAND 13

## Briefing Outline

- Governance
- Assessment and accountability
- Human resources
- ➔ • Discipline and student behavior
- Resource allocation

11 Mar 2003

RAND 14

## Discipline and Safety Are Serious Concerns

- In many schools, instructional time is sacrificed to address behavior problems
  - But some schools manage discipline well
- Teachers do not perceive policies for promoting discipline as coherent or pro-active
  - Problem at school and district levels
  - Solution in one school can worsen the problem in another school (“dumping”)
    - Magnets have more discretion to remove pupils than do other schools

11 Mar 2003

RAND 15

## Briefing Outline

- Governance
- Assessment and accountability
- Human resources
- Discipline and student behavior
- ➔ • Resource allocation

11 Mar 2003

RAND 16

## PPS is Devoting Some Additional Resources to Students Below Proficiency

- Assigning strong principals to historically low-achieving schools
- Establishing supplemental programs in basic skills in reading and math
- Extending school day in low-achieving schools
- Special education students get substantial attention

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RAND 17

## But Sorting of Staff and Students Creates Stratified System

- Low-performing schools often get weakest teachers
  - More likely to be uncertified
  - Better teachers can choose better schools: no incentive to apply
- Comprehensive schools perceived as dumping grounds for students with low achievement or behavior problems
  - Magnets can kick out kids who don't satisfy behavioral contract
- Gifted program operates as "private school within a public school"

11 Mar 2003

RAND 18

## Key Concerns

- Governance problems affect the schools, undermining educational initiatives
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**Staff**

Eloise Hirsh, *Director*

Dina Vargo,

*Communications Manager*

Stan Herman, *Consultant*

Judith Hall,

*Administrative Assistant*

**Consulting Organizations**

*Pennsylvania Economy League*

Jim Turner

Michael Weir

Cecilia Cagni

*The RAND Corporation*

Brian Gill, Principal Researcher

Rachel Christina

Rebecca Clothey

Jake Dembosky

Tom Glennan

Deanna Hill

*Writing*

Jeffery Fraser

*Editing (Full Report)*

Jim Davidson

*Design*

Landesberg Design

*Printing*

Geyer Printing

Mayor's Commission  
on Public Education

Regional Enterprise Tower  
425 Sixth Avenue  
Suite 1430  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

*phone* 412 258 2660

*fax* 412 258 2666

[www.educationcommission.org](http://www.educationcommission.org)