

Definitions and sources of information

All information is from the 2004-05 school year unless noted.

Abbreviations:

PPS: Pittsburgh Public Schools

RTI: Real Time Information, a PPS Web-based student information management system (A+ Schools was granted read-only access to RTI under a confidentiality agreement with PPS)

PDE: Pennsylvania Department of Education

School name, address, phone number, principal

Definition: The current principal or acting principal is listed.

Sources: Current edition of PPS' "Public School Choices" and PPS Web site (10/05).

School description

Definition: "Magnet school" refers to a whole-school magnet (all students must apply to attend). "School with a magnet program" refers to a school with magnet and neighborhood (feeder pattern) components.

Sources: Current edition of PPS' "Public School Choices" and PPS Web site.

School building capacity

Definition: "School building capacity: percent used" is the school's total enrollment for 2004-05 divided by the functional capacity of the school (the amount of space in the building used for classrooms).

Source: PPS.

Enrollment

Definition: Total number of students enrolled in the school.

Source: RTI (1/05).

Student race/ethnicity

Definition: PPS defines a student's race as black, white, or "other," based on parents' identification. "Other" consists of American-Indian, Asian and Hispanic students. Percents may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Source: RTI.

Student daily attendance

Definition: Percentages were determined by dividing average daily student attendance by enrollment.

Source: RTI.

Family income status

Definition: Percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch (a measure of family poverty).

Source: RTI.

Special features

Definition: Partnerships, projects and other kinds of learning experiences not offered at every school.

Sources: Selected by A+ Schools from PPS' "Public School Choices," PPS Web site, communication with school principals, and other sources.

School closings plan status

Definition: How each school would be affected by the "Final Recommendation of the Right-Sizing Plan" released on 2/9/06.

Source: "Final Recommendation of the Right-Sizing Plan," PPS, 2/9/06.

Tests given by the district

Definition: 1st grade PPS Reading Assessment (percentage of students at Proficient/Advanced achievement levels for reading comprehension, based on one-on-one testing—one adult testing one child at a time); 7th and 9th grades TerraNova Reading (percentage of students at Proficient/Advanced achievement levels); 2nd and 7th grades TerraNova Mathematics (percentage of students at Proficient/Advanced achievement levels); 10th grade New Standards Mathematics Examination (percentage of students achieving the overall standard in mathematics—a total standard score of 150 or greater); 5th, 8th and 11th grades PASS (Partnership for the Assessment of Standards-based Science) (percentage of students at Proficient/Advanced achievement levels in 2004).

Source: RTI.

Tests required by the state: PSSA

Definition: Percentage of students at Proficient/Advanced achievement levels on PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) Reading and Math tests. Levels (score ranges) include "Advanced," "Proficient," "Basic" and "Below Basic." Third grade scores were rounded to zero decimal places.

Source: PDE.

School ratings: School Performance Index

Definition: An estimate of each school's average contribution to students' reading and math achievement, 1=least, 4=most.

Source: RAND Corp., B. Gill, J. Engberg, K. Booker, "Assessing the Performance of Public Schools in Pittsburgh," 2005. RAND created the School Performance Index to help inform the 2005-06 school closings process. See the full report at www.rand.org/publications/WR/WR315/.

School ratings: Average Student Achievement

Definition: On a 100-point scale, an estimate of average student achievement in reading and math at each school, based on PSSA, TerraNova and New Standards assessments.

Source: RAND Corp., B. Gill, J. Engberg, K. Booker, "Assessing the Performance of Public Schools in Pittsburgh," 2005. RAND created the Average Student Achievement Index to help inform the 2005-06 school closings process. See the full report at www.rand.org/publications/WR/WR315/.

Graduation rate

Definition: The 2005 graduation rate was determined by adding the number of dropouts in 9th grade in 2001-02, in 10th grade in 2002-03, in 11th grade in 2003-04, and in 12th grade in 2004-05 to the number of 2005 graduates, then dividing the number of 2005 graduates by that total.

Source: RTI.

SAT scores

Definition: The SAT is an admissions test required by many colleges.

Sources: 2005 SAT average verbal and math standard scores for each school, PDE; state and national average scores 2001-05, College Board.

Percent taking SAT

Definition: Number of students taking the SAT in 12th grade divided by 12th grade student enrollment.

Source: PDE.

Additional information used for strengths/challenges

College-bound seniors

Definition: Percentage of graduates in 2004 who reported that they were planning to attend a two- or four-year college/university or an institution granting a specialized associates' degree.

Source: PDE.

Violent offenders

Definition: A "violent offender" is defined as a student who is involved in an incidence of violence and/or weapons possession. "Percentage of violent offenders" is the number of unique student offenders divided by the total school enrollment. Information is from 2003-04.

Source: PDE.

Student race/ethnicity, family income status

Definition: Race/ethnicity reflects PPS definitions (see "Student race/ethnicity" on the previous page). Test information for students in the "Other" category was not reported by PDE for most Pittsburgh schools due to their small numbers, and so was not used for comparisons in this report. "Low-income students" refers to students eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

Source: PDE.

For more information

A+ Schools: www.aplusschools.org

Pittsburgh Public Schools: www.pps.k12.pa.us

Pennsylvania Department of Education: www.pde.state.pa.us

How were each school's "strengths" and "challenges" determined?

We compared each school to district averages at the same level (elementary schools to elementary averages, and so on). For elementary schools, there were 15 points of comparison; for K-8s, 25; for middle schools, 13; and for high schools, 25.

A school's performance statistically above* the district average in one category was labeled a strength, while its performance statistically below** the district average in another category was labeled a challenge. In a school where performance was above the district average for nearly all categories, performance only at the average in a single category was considered a challenge. Likewise, average performance by a school that was below average in most categories was considered a strength. (One exception: An above-average number of violent offenders was labeled a challenge, while a below-average number was labeled a strength.) Not every strength and every challenge is included. For a comprehensive list, see www.aplusschools.org.

Strengths/challenges statements are intended to be interpreted within the context of each school. The same statement may be listed as a strength for one school and a challenge for another. Although this component of the report is based on district averages, readers should not conclude that we are endorsing average achievement. In the district's high schools, for example, "average" is below any acceptable standard.

How to interpret comparisons that group students by race or family income

PSSA test results were compared in these ways:

- All students in a school, or a grade within a school, compared to district averages for all students at that level or grade (all middle school students, or all high school seniors...)
- Black students in a school or grade compared to district averages for black students at that level or grade
- White students in a school or grade compared to district averages for white students at that level or grade
- Low-income students (eligible for free/reduced price lunch) in a school or grade compared to district averages for low-income students at that level or grade

Keep in mind that these comparison groups hold even when the school's population is all one race, or all low-income. For example, a statement such as "High PSSA 5th grade reading scores for low-income students" in a school with 100% low-income students is still a comparison of those students to district averages for low-income fifth graders, not to all fifth graders.

* At least one standard deviation above the district average

** At least one standard deviation below the district average