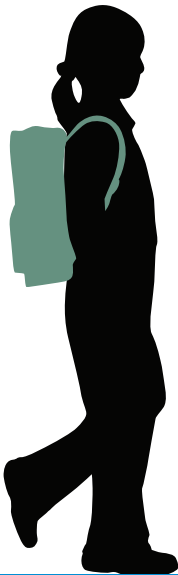




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**SECOND ANNUAL**

**REPORT** TO THE  
**COMMUNITY**

**ON PUBLIC SCHOOL PROGRESS  
IN PITTSBURGH**



# Introduction

A+ Schools believes that public schools are the backbone of the city. The quality of our schools is of vital interest to children, parents, taxpayers, residents and all those who care about the city's future.

A+ Schools' second *Report to the Community* aims to provide readers with a fair and comprehensive look at the progress each public school is making in Pittsburgh. Increasingly in recent years, conversations and decisions concerning school quality rely on data, making common, accessible information ever more important. We thank the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* for helping to ensure the widest possible distribution of this report.

The 2006-07 school year is a year of significant change for the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Twenty-two schools have closed, eight have been reconstituted as "Accelerated Learning Academies" (ALAs), and 10 elementaries have become K-8s. As a result, many students are attending different schools. Other schools, particularly middle and high schools, have not experienced changes.

This report is based on data from the **2005-06 school year**. Therefore, most of the changes outlined above are not reflected here. For example, schools that are **new K-8s** this year are located in the **elementary section** based on their 2005-06 status. However, the selection of schools to be included *was* influenced by the district's new configuration: schools which existed in 2005-06 but are now closed were not included, and **ALAs were not included** because they have been reconstituted. Look for the first year of data about the ALAs in next year's report. Please note: despite the reorganization of the district, the schools included in this report are likely to remain open in the foreseeable future, meaning information about their performance is of continuing importance.

We wish to thank the Pittsburgh Public Schools for its cooperation in making data available to A+ Schools. Information in the report includes:

- Data about each school for the **2005-06** school year
- How each school compares to district averages
- How each school measures up to the state standard—"proficiency" on PSSA tests—and whether proficiency levels are increasing or decreasing over time
- A+ Schools' summary of each school's strengths and challenges (see page 63 for an explanation of how these were identified)
- Information about each level (elementary, K-8, middle, high) on the cover page of each section

Information that reflects the **current year** as a service to readers includes:

- Names of principals and school contact information
- Changes in the grade configuration, if any (such as "K-8 in 2006-07")

- Special education services by school
- Special features of each school
- Names of schools (for example, Homewood Montessori is listed under its new name, Pittsburgh Montessori)

The "indicators" of school progress (categories of data) were originally selected by an A+ Schools' committee headed by Dr. Alan Lesgold, dean of the School of Education, University of Pittsburgh. These indicators are based on research about school quality (limited by which data were available). Last year, we invited readers to use an enclosed feedback form to comment on the indicators and other aspects of the report. We thank those of you who responded—more than 200—and encourage this year's readers to use the form on page 65 for the same purpose.

## New this year

This year's report includes several new indicators and other changes. Prompted by readers, we created a section on the **charter schools** located within the city, beginning on page 57. Charter schools are free, public schools operated independently of school districts. Each has its own mission and measures of student achievement (although all must give the PSSA at required grade levels). Therefore, we caution readers against comparing one charter school to another or to district schools. (Not every charter school chose to participate or was able to meet our publication deadline. See our Web site, [www.aplusschools.org](http://www.aplusschools.org), for updated information.)

This year, on the cover page for each level, we have provided indicators of achievement and test participation for **students receiving special education services** in district schools. (At the school level, test scores and proficiency levels that we report include all students who took the tests, regardless of special education status.) Again, we did not include any information about the district's special education centers due to

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# Introduction

the lack of meaningful achievement indicators for groups of students with diverse special needs.

The **graduation rate** indicator we report comes from a RAND Corporation study of estimated graduation rates over four or five years, rather than the single-year number provided by the district for our previous report. However, the RAND **“School Performance Index”** and **“Average Student Achievement”** ratings we reported last year had not been updated in time for this publication. When they are available, we will post them on the A+ Schools Web site or you may call us at 412-258-2660 for the information.

## “No Child Left Behind”

The primary rating of schools today is by their “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP) under federal “No Child Left Behind” guidelines, which indicates whether the overall performance of students in the school

and the performance of various subgroups are meeting federal goals. We believe this one-dimensional “grade” is inadequate. AYP relies almost solely on PSSA results in reading and math. Although it’s based on two years of test scores, AYP is not the true measure of progress its name suggests because it fails to take into account where a school started. One school not making AYP may actually have made great progress, while a school surpassing the AYP threshold may be stagnating. Because our goal is to help identify educational effectiveness, and because we understand that is a complex matter, there is no reference here to a school’s AYP status.

## Reporting by race and family income

Readers may wonder why, for some district schools, the “strengths and challenges” we identified categorize test results by students’ race and family income. After all, research has shown that the quality of teaching in the classroom is the most important factor in whether or not a student succeeds. We draw these comparisons for two reasons. First, as is the case nationally, Pittsburgh has a large achievement gap between African-American and white students and between students from low-income families and other students. Yet the report shows that in some schools, African-American students and students from low-income families do better than city averages. Second, new initiatives and interventions instituted by Superintendent Mark Roosevelt and the Pittsburgh Board of Education are designed to close the race and income achievement gaps and to boost achievement for students overall. In future years, we hope readers will be able to use information from these reports to judge for themselves whether or not these strategies are working.

## Interpreting the report

Much of this report is based on test scores. However, we urge readers to approach test scores with caution. We report tests for selected grade levels, not for every grade in a school. The report shows how a school compares to the state standard over time, not whether individual students’ scores are improving over time. Regardless of which tests or student groups we report on, test results may not adequately represent students’ achievement, due to personal factors such as students’ test anxiety, and/or technical reasons for score fluctuations including changes in the test itself.

This report is not a substitute for visiting schools and observing in classrooms. Many aspects of student learning and school quality can’t be translated into numbers. For example, test scores may not reflect the value for students of keeping writing portfolios, engaging in arts experiences, or conducting science inquiries. Currently, we have no adequate measures of teachers’ enthusiasm for their work, principals’ leadership skills, or meaningful parent and community involvement in a school. We urge readers to consider this report as a tool for framing further questions as they continue to seek information about the quality of our schools.

## How to use this report

This report is intended to help readers define questions and identify areas where they need more information about a school. Here are some possible next steps.

- Ask the principal or a teacher about the school’s plan to raise student achievement. Ask for specifics: “What is being done right now to help struggling readers, or to increase the graduation rate?” Compare the plan to the information in the report: does the plan appear to address school needs?
- Ask the principal or a parent leader to schedule a parent/community meeting to discuss this report. Ask participants to help define the school’s needs based on data shown here. Discuss the school’s plan to address them and how the community can help.
- If you are a parent, join a parent group at your school. Research shows that most high-achieving schools have high levels of parent involvement. Share your ideas for increasing parent participation, or your strategies for the school improvement plan.

Call A+ Schools at 412-258-2660 if you need help interpreting this report, to discuss school improvement strategies, to request a facilitator for a parent or community meeting, or for help planning a classroom visit.

**See pages 62-64 for more information about any indicator.**