

Definitions and sources of information

All information is from the **2005-06 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/administrator

Definition: The current school name and principal, acting principal or administrator as of 10/06 is listed.

Sources: Current edition of PPS' "Public School Choices," PPS Web site (10/06) and individual charter schools.

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. A school's grade configuration (K-5, K-8...) reflects the 2005-06 school year. If the current grade configuration is different, the change is noted in parentheses, such as "(K-8 in 2006-07)." "Pre-K" means the school serves or served children from ages three to five in an early childhood program.

Sources: 2005-06 and 2006-07 editions of PPS' "Public School Choices," PPS Web site, and PPS Office of Early Childhood Programs.

Number of teachers

Definition: Total number of classroom teachers in the school.

Sources: PPS and individual charter schools.

Enrollment

Definition: Total number of students enrolled in the school.

Sources: RTI (1/06) and individual charter schools.

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. Charter schools provided similar information. Percents may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Sources: RTI and individual charter schools.

Student daily attendance

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

Sources: RTI and individual charter schools.

Special education

Definition: Special education services offered at each district

school in the 2006-07 school year, excluding programs for students identified as "gifted." For definitions of services, see www.pps.k12.pa.us/academicoffice/specialeducation/.

Source: PPS Program for Students with Exceptionalities (9/06).

Family income status

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

Sources: RTI and individual charter schools.

Special features

Definition: Partnerships, projects and other kinds of learning experiences not offered at every school (2006-07).

Sources: Selected by A+ Schools from the current edition of PPS' "Public School Choices," PPS Web site and other sources, information provided by charter schools, and charter school Web sites.

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, 7th and 10th grades TerraNova Mathematics (percentage of students at Proficient/Advanced achievement levels).

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.

Graduation rate

Definition: The estimated percentage of students in district schools who started 9th grade in 1999 or 2000 and graduated in five years or less.

Source: RAND Corp., J. Engberg and B. Gill, "Estimating Graduation and Dropout Rates with Longitudinal Data: A Case Study in the Pittsburgh Public Schools," 2006. See the full report at www.rand.org/pubs/working_papers/2006/RAND_WR372.pdf.

SAT scores

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

Sources: 2006 SAT average Critical Reading and Mathematics standard scores for each school, PDE and Northside Urban Pathways Charter School; national and state average scores, College Board.

Percent taking SAT

Definition: Number of district high school graduates in 2006 who took

the SAT at least once divided by the total number of 2006 graduates; percent of juniors and seniors at Northside Urban Pathways Charter School who took the SAT in the 2005-06 school year.

Sources: PDE and Northside Urban Pathways Charter School.

Percent taking AP courses

Definition: Number of students taking at least one AP (Advanced Placement) course divided by total student enrollment.

Sources: PPS and Northside Urban Pathways Charter School.

Information by level

Special education: PSSA participation

Definition: Percentage of students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP), excluding gifted students, who took the PSSA for Reading and Math.

Source: PDE.

Special education: PSSA performance

Definition: Percentage of students with an Individual Education Plan, excluding gifted students, who scored at the Proficient or Advanced achievement levels on the PSSA for Reading and Math.

Source: PDE.

Special education: PASA participation

Definition: Total number of students who took the PASA (Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment, for students with significant cognitive disabilities) for Reading and Math. Information is from the 2004-05 school year.

Source: PDE.

PSSA score ranges

Definition: The percentage of students at each level who scored in the “Advanced,” “Proficient,” “Basic” and “Below Basic” score ranges. (For a similar breakdown of scores by school, see the A+ Schools Web site: www.aplusschools.org.)

Source: PDE.

Additional information used for district schools’ strengths/challenges

Change in graduation rate

Definition: Change in graduation rate from 2003 to 2006, using the state’s formula for calculating rates. For example, the 2006 rate was determined by adding the number of dropouts in 9th grade in 2002-03, in 10th grade in 2003-04, in 11th grade in 2004-05, and in 12th grade in 2005-06 to the number of 2006 graduates, then dividing the number of 2006 graduates by that total. (Please note: the numbers used for change in rate are based on a different formula than the RAND graduation rate; however, all schools were compared using the same formula.)

Source: RTI.

How were each district 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 14 points of comparison; for K-8s, 24; for middle schools, 12; and for high schools, 24.

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. 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

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Definitions and sources of information

Change in SAT scores

Definition: Increase or decrease in SAT scores, 2002-06.

Source: PDE.

College-bound seniors

Definition: Percentage of graduates in 2005 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.

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.pghboe.net

City Charter High School: www.cityhigh.org

Manchester Academic Charter School: www.macsk8.org

Northside Urban Pathways Charter School:
www.pathways.k12.pa.us

Urban League of Pittsburgh Charter School: www.ulpcs.org

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

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