



# REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

ON PUBLIC SCHOOL PROGRESS  
IN PITTSBURGH

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2007

# 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.**

Mailed copies of the report include a postage-paid feedback form which readers can use to comment on any aspect of the report. If your copy does not include a feedback form and you would like to share your views, please contact us at 412-258-2660 or [info@aplusschools.org](mailto:info@aplusschools.org).

A+ Schools publishes a Web-only component of the report with additional, detailed information. If you would like to be notified when the Web report is posted online, contact us at 412-258-2660 or [info@aplusschools.org](mailto:info@aplusschools.org).

**See pages 73-74 for more information about any indicator.**

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# 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' third *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 wish to thank the Pittsburgh Public Schools for its cooperation in making data available to A+ Schools.

This year's report, based on the **2006-07 school year**, reflects significant change in

the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Along with closing 22 schools before the beginning of that year, the district opened one elementary school (Arsenal), reconstituted eight schools as "Accelerated Learning Academies," and reorganized 10 elementary schools as K-8s. Because of shifts in school populations caused by these changes, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) changed the status of 21 schools in the Pittsburgh district to "new" that year. For those schools, PDE doesn't consider scores from previous years for the purposes of its accountability system.

How will these changes affect what readers see in this year's report?

Since our goal is to show whether or not schools are making progress, we publish four years of data about average student achievement on the state test, the PSSA, for selected grade levels. In this report, however, **"new" schools will only show PSSA test data for 2006-07.**

In last year's report, we did not include the **Accelerated Learning Academies** because they were reconstituted. All but one—Colfax—were declared "new" by PDE due to changes in their student population. This year, we report four years of PSSA data for Colfax in recognition that its legal status hasn't changed.

Other information in the report includes:

- Data about each school for the **2006-07** school year
- How each school compares to district averages
- How each school measures up to the

## Key dates for school choice

### ***When to register your child for a magnet program in the Pittsburgh Public Schools***

Registration for magnet programs takes place the year before a child enters the school.

**Preferred registration:** November 5-9, 2007

(For students who get preference because they're moving to the next level of a program, because they live in a neighborhood that gets preference for a certain school, or because they have a sibling already enrolled in the magnet program. Preference doesn't guarantee acceptance to the program.)

**General registration:** November 12-30

For more information, see the district Web site, [www.pps.k12.pa.us](http://www.pps.k12.pa.us), or call the parent hotline: 412-622-7920.

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 75 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 schools (school names were changed for the 2007-08 school year)
- Names of principals and school contact information
- Special education services by school
- Special features of each school

For the second year, we have included a section on the **charter schools** located within the city, beginning on page 68. 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). Not every charter school was able to meet our publication deadline. We thank the schools who provided data for the report.

We do not report a **graduation rate** this year. Last year, we published rates from a RAND Corporation study of estimated graduation rates over four or five years. RAND is currently updating this information. When it’s available, graduation rates for each high school will be posted on the A+ Schools Web site: [www.aplusschools.org](http://www.aplusschools.org). RAND’s updated **assessment of school performance**, the “School Performance Index” and “Average Student Achievement” ratings, will also be posted when available.

Once again, we did not include any information about the district’s **special education centers** due to the lack of meaningful achievement indicators for groups of students with diverse special needs. (Test scores and proficiency levels that we report for each school include all students who took the tests, regardless of special education status.)

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 the best data currently available from schools.

Finally, this year’s report includes a **“School Choice Checklist”** for parents and guardians who are gathering information about schools before their children enroll, transfer, or move to the next level. We hope this tool will help readers evaluate important factors that are beyond the scope of this report. (See key dates for school choice on page 2.)

### 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,

*continued on next page*



**The report includes data about each school, comparisons to district averages, PSSA scores over time, and an analysis of each school’s strengths and challenges.**



**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.**

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, recent 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.

## **Please join us**

*for a briefing on this report*

### **2007 Report to the Community Briefing**

6:00 p.m., Thursday, November 15, 2007  
Pittsburgh Weil PreK-8  
2250 Centre Avenue, Hill District

We'll review the report, explain how to use it, and answer your questions. Childcare will be available and light refreshments will be served.

Please RSVP by November 13th  
to [www.aplusschools.org](http://www.aplusschools.org) or 412-258-2660, ext 101