2014 Report to the Community on Public School Progress in Pittsburgh

Tenth anniversary edition with new information!
Our Vision
A public education system in Pittsburgh where:
• Overall student achievement continues to rise, with 100 percent of students graduating and 80 percent completing a training program or two- or four-year college or university program.
• Race is not a factor in determining which students are in the highest/lowest achievement categories, graduate from high school or matriculate into training programs or college.

Our Purpose
To be a community force advancing the highest educational achievement and character development for every public school student.

Our Focus
We focus on issues of educational equity because significant barriers exist that directly and indirectly deny groups of students a high quality education. To achieve educational equity in Pittsburgh Public Schools, policies and practices must be in place that specifically increase opportunities and resources for African-American students.

Our Work
To focus community attention on specific issues through research and policy analysis; to engage and elevate community voices from those communities most at risk; to create opportunities at multiple levels for community involvement aimed at removing barriers to student success; and to build broad community support to advance change in Pittsburgh Public Schools.
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The artwork on the front cover includes, clockwise from the left, “I Am Dijon,” by Dijon H.; “My Fifth Grade Year,” by Tailynn A.; “It’s Me—Timothy,” by Timothy G.; and “Here I Am,” by Nahseya S. The artists were fifth graders in the 2012-13 school year. The artwork on the back cover, “Another Universe,” was created by Jacqueline J., also a fifth grader in the 2012-13 school year. Photography by Greg Blackman.
How to use this report

This report is intended to provide you with common, accessible information about the Pittsburgh Public Schools and the city’s public charter schools. We hope it will help you to monitor school progress and to define questions and identify areas where you need more information. Here are some ways you can use the information presented here, as a parent or guardian and/or a concerned citizen.

1. If you have a child in school, ask the principal or a teacher for more information about the data reported here. You might ask:
   • How do you monitor student achievement data?
   • What strategies are in place to make sure students make at least a year’s worth of growth?
   • What extra supports are available to children in areas where they struggle academically?
   • What can be done to address chronic absenteeism?
   • How does the school keep students on track for the Pittsburgh Promise college scholarship? What kinds of supports are available to help students plan for post-secondary education and training?
   • Which students have access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses?
   • How can we encourage our students to participate in more academic competitions, service projects, community leadership opportunities, and arts events and competitions? Which students have access to information about these opportunities?
   • What is being done to ensure that each child is benefiting from excellent instruction?
   • Does the school have an area of focus for instructional development?
   • How do you support new teachers and retain effective teachers? How do you know that your system is working?
   • What parent organization can I join to be more involved in the school? (If the school doesn’t have one, contact us to see if we can help you start one!)

2. If you work for a community organization, consider how you can contribute to the success of a school. Ask the principal or a teacher about the school’s overall goals and its plan to raise student achievement. Compare the plan to the information in the report. Does the plan appear to address school needs? Are there gaps that your organization could fill?

3. Connect with a school near you to find opportunities to mentor, tutor, or volunteer in other ways.

4. Discuss the report with your school board representative, and ask about ways that the district’s leadership is working to address student achievement.

Call A+ Schools at 412-697-1298 if you need help interpreting this report, to discuss school improvement strategies, or to request a presenter or facilitator for a parent or community meeting.

Mailed copies of the report include a postage-paid feedback form you can use to comment on any aspect of the report. If your copy doesn’t include a feedback form and you’d like to share your views, contact us at 412-697-1298 or info@aplusschools.org. If you find this report valuable, please let us know! Your interest will help us raise resources to continue its publication.
Five ways A+ Schools makes a difference

A+ Schools works to keep the focus of the community on improving excellence and equity in our schools. We serve as a resource and a catalyst for change, collecting and distributing critical information and providing specific ways for the community to help make our schools great.

Here are five key ways we partner with the community to improve Pittsburgh’s schools.

1. We keep watch over Pittsburgh’s schools.

A strong public school system has effective leadership that is fully accountable, fiscally responsible, and strategically focused to ensure a high quality education for all students. Our work provides important oversight and helps ensure accountability at all of Pittsburgh’s public schools.

• This past year A+ Schools led the effort to rally community support to secure a multi-year approval from the Pennsylvania Department of Education for Pittsburgh Public Schools’ new teacher evaluation system. Thanks to the advocacy efforts of our community, this system is now approved for the next three years and students in Pittsburgh are benefiting from teachers who receive accurate, reliable feedback for improvement and are held to high standards.

• Through our Board Watch program, volunteers attend school board meetings, serving as independent observers and evaluators of the board’s performance. Because of the work of Board Watch volunteers, board meeting agendas are posted online and the doors are open to the community. We issue quarterly report cards and recommendations based on Board Watch reports. The school board has responded to 65% of Board Watch recommendations over the past five-and-a-half years, resulting in better governance.

• A+ Schools is part of the Campaign for Fair Education Funding, a state-wide coalition with more than 40 members that advocates for equitable, adequate, predictable, and sustainable school funding for all Pennsylvania districts. We participate in several other statewide coalitions that work for policies such as college- and career-ready academic standards, and protecting excellent teachers.

• Throughout our ten-year history, you have counted on A+ Schools to keep an eye on the educational landscape and keep you informed when big changes are on the horizon—such as superintendent transitions, budget issues, school board elections, and state policy changes—that require community input and attention. We’ve hosted town hall meetings, and published reports and position papers on these important issues over the years.

2. We mobilize the community.

In the quest for quality public education, we strive to involve the entire community: students, parents, the general public, neighborhood associations, religious groups, and non-profit organizations, as well as school administrators, teachers, and public officials. We partner with a wide range of community organizations.

• Our School Works program recruits and mobilizes community volunteers to conduct confidential interviews with teachers, principals, and guidance counselors. These interviews let us gather information on the inner workings of Pittsburgh’s schools and make recommendations for improvements. More than 500 volunteers have interviewed over 250 school staff in the past five years.

• TeenBloc brings together high school students from across Pittsburgh to participate in leadership development and community organizing aimed at improving public education in Pittsburgh. Last year, students engaged over 1,700 of their peers to support the adoption of a Student Bill of Rights (see page 101), a majority of which was ultimately approved by the Board of Education.

• Parent Nation supports and develops parent leaders who demand equitable and excellent education at some of Pittsburgh’s most vulnerable schools. Parents have been successful at getting transportation for their children, starting volunteer programs that help support teachers and staff, and getting additional staffing for their schools. For example, more than 200 Langley K-8 students are taking the bus to school this year because A+ Schools helped parents advocate for PennDOT to declare a route to school hazardous, clearing the way for state reimbursement for bus transportation. First graders and kindergartners at Faison K-5 started the year with enough teachers because A+ Schools helped parents, students, and school staff demand that those grades be fully staffed.
3. We collect critical data.

As an independent community advocate for improvement in public education, we serve as a resource for facts, evidence, best practices, and research, with a focus on equitable outcomes for all students.

- Our independent analysis of the evaluation system created under the Empowering Effective Teachers Plan laid out recommendations for ways to improve the system so every child can benefit from great teaching in every classroom every day. We learned from teachers, principals, and parents about how this work has an impact on the classroom.

- Interviews conducted by School Works volunteers during visits with school staff each fall produce valuable information on current conditions and supports available for quality teaching and learning. Our School Works recommendations have resulted in improved practices in schools, including increased access to advanced courses, the adoption of positive behavioral management plans, and reductions in some counselor caseloads.

4. We keep you informed.

Parents and community members need facts to understand what is being proposed, to talk things through, and to provide feedback on important issues. A+ Schools provides information and brings the public together in community meetings to discuss the findings and determine priorities.

- Over 10,000 people have viewed our short film on Pittsburgh’s Teacher Improvement System. Another 6,000 people received our brief that analyzed the district’s teacher evaluation system and how it is helping Pittsburgh’s teachers improve and accelerate student achievement.

- Over 1,500 people have participated in citywide meetings to hear the findings of our School Works research. School Works reports are distributed to thousands each year.

- This annual Report to the Community provides detailed information so families can monitor progress in each of Pittsburgh’s public schools and charter schools, and make informed decisions on their choices of schools. This year, we have significantly revised the report to provide readers with critical information related to the equity issues we care about. continued on p.4

Advanced courses help prepare students for the rigor of college classes.

Parents and teachers now have a shared understanding of why advanced courses are important.

- Over 100 more students took AP classes in 2012-2013 than in 2011-2012

75% of counselors in the district have more than 250 students.

The American School Counselor Association recommends that school counselors work with no more than 250 students.

75% of counselors in the district have more than 250 students.

Source: Principal, Teacher and Counselor Interviews 2010 - 2012

In 2010, the district changed its rules so that any high school student qualifying academically could enroll in Center for Advanced Studies courses. The number of black students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses has doubled over the past three years.

Source: Principal, Teacher and Counselor Interviews 2010 - 2012

School counselors provide critical social support and academic counseling to students.

The American School Counselor Association recommends that school counselors work with no more than 250 students.

75% of counselors in the district have more than 250 students.

Grade 6-12 school average

Source: Principal and Counselor Interviews 2010 - 2012

For more information, visit www.aplusschools.org/2014-report.
5. We inspire community action.

A+ Schools uses the data generated from our projects to create political pressure that influences policy and creates change that improves our schools. Our members, volunteers, partners, staff, and board members organize community outreach events, engage the media, and testify at hearings before the school board and other elected officials. We encourage the public to get involved.

- Earlier this year, TeenBloc members made specific demands of district administration and the School Board to include a Student Bill of Rights in the Board’s revisions to the Student Code of Conduct, and won that change.

- We have engaged thousands of Pittsburghers over the past three school board elections through our Voter Education efforts. Partnering with local community organizations, we have hosted over 20 community forums to help keep you informed about who’s running for school board.

- Over 1,500 supporters joined our Equitable School Budgets campaign to demand that the district distribute and allocate resources to schools based on student needs. We advocated for every school to provide music, art, library services, and social workers/counselors for its students; and for every high school to offer foreign languages, career and technical education, and Advanced Placement (AP) courses. As a result, 10 schools that lacked library, arts, or music education now provide it. Approximately 3,000 students now have access to these resources.

- Our Make Great Teaching Count effort with 20 community partner organizations collected more than 1,500 signatures demanding that the district and the teachers union keep the best teachers when making painful layoff decisions. Despite the actions of many parents, students, educators, and community members—post cards, letters to the editor, testimony at public hearings, participation in a rally—170 classroom teachers were laid off in 2012 with no consideration of teacher quality. A+ Schools will continue to press for changes so future staffing decisions include measures of effectiveness.

“A high-performance, fiscally responsible, more accountable school district is within the city’s reach. But it will require an agenda of bold, fundamental reform, and a new openness to community involvement.”

— Pittsburgh Mayor’s Commission on Public Education, September 2003

**A+ Schools: Working for equitable and excellent public schools for ten years**

Ten years ago A+ Schools was founded to be Pittsburgh’s Community Alliance for Public Education. Over those ten years we’ve seen three superintendents, shifts in school board membership, the right-sizing of our district with the closing of over 30 schools, and modest gains in student achievement. During that time, A+ Schools has grown in order to meet needs that the community has brought to our attention. We’ve built programs that help students and parents advocate for issues they care about. We’ve also helped the community better understand our schools.

In 2012, we revised our strategy for school reform after a series of community and board meetings. We realized that if we were going to accelerate change, we needed to make a shift in how we engaged and mobilized the community. Since then, we’ve built citywide networks of parents, students, educators, and community members—post cards, letters to the editor, testimony at public hearings, participation in a rally—170 classroom teachers were laid off in 2012 with no consideration of teacher quality. A+ Schools will continue to press for changes so future staffing decisions include measures of effectiveness.

This shift in strategy is bearing fruit, and we continue to be amazed by the dedication, creativity, and commitment of our parents and students to demand better outcomes for all students, especially black and brown students.
Introduction

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the original publication of our annual Report to the Community. That first year, we reported on 80 district schools. This year, we report on 50 district schools, and seven charter schools.

As the city and the Pittsburgh School District have changed, so has A+ Schools. Over the past 10 years, we’ve grown programs, engaged the public, and run campaigns to advocate for changes that would improve equity and excellence in our schools.

Compared to ten years ago, we know more about what an equitable system would look like: a great teacher in every classroom, resources distributed according to need, opportunities provided to unlock students’ potential, and extra supports for students who need them. And we can count some tangible successes. Students will benefit from teachers who receive accurate, reliable feedback for improvement and are held to high standards because A+ Schools and others worked to build support for a multi-year approval from the Pennsylvania Department of Education for the district’s new teacher evaluation system. A+ Schools’ TeenBloc students created a Student Bill of Rights (page 101) that is supported by district leadership, acknowledged by the elected school board, and incorporated into the Student Code of Conduct. However, troubling inequities persist in our district.

Equity doesn’t mean an equal split of resources; rather, it involves a strategic allocation. For the 10th anniversary edition, we have redesigned and reorganized this report around equity indicators that research has identified as important. We have tightened the focus of the report, taken advantage of new sources of information and greater access to data, and attempted to better frame the information for readers.

To this end, the school pages now identify and highlight data about teaching, resources, school climate, and readiness. For example, we have spotlighted the percentages of teachers performing at Proficient and Distinguished levels, per pupil spending, student responses to survey questions, and the percentage of students who qualified for the Pittsburgh Promise scholarship. Because test scores are only one part of an overall picture of a school’s health, we have reduced the number of tests we report in favor of “key indicators:” 3rd grade reading proficiency, 8th grade algebra taking, and Keystone Exam achievement by 11th grade. We still report PSSA tests over time for selected grade levels, but we also show the racial achievement gap, which we define as the difference between black student achievement at the school and white student achievement in the district overall. We are now able to report more information that provides context for a school’s level of achievement, such as student stability, and teacher and parent responses to surveys. On the comparison chart pages (16-20), readers will be able to compare schools of different types more easily, and view additional indicators, such as each school’s value-added ratings (a measure of growth).

We have also included a graphic representation of inequities high school students experience, based on the work of TeenBloc students (pages 8-9), Pittsburgh’s new Student Bill of Rights (page 101), and a report from the Advocates for African-American Students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools on the continuing struggle for educational equity (page 100).

In addition to the print information, we now have an online, searchable version of the report that includes more data, at aplusschools.org/2014-report. Some information previously included in the print version has been moved online.

Once again, the report contains data for all of the charter schools within the city. (Charter schools are free, public schools operated independently of school districts.) We thank the schools for providing information. Please note: Career Connections Charter School has closed, and doesn’t appear in this report.

Again this year, the report includes an executive summary. The executive summary, beginning on page 10, is an analysis of some aspects of the reported data and an examination of trends.
The report also contains:
- Data about each school for the **2013-14** school year
- Comparisons of each school to district averages
- Achievement information: how each school measures up to state “proficiency” levels on PSSA tests and Keystone exams, and whether proficiency levels are increasing or decreasing over time
- Information about each level (elementary, K-8, middle, 6-12, and high) on the cover page of each section, along with comparable state-level data
- An index of schools grouped by region (page 116)

**What are the PSSA tests and Keystone exams?**

The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, or **PSSA**, is the state test for third through eighth graders. Testing takes place in the spring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSSA content area</th>
<th>Grades tested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading &amp; Math</td>
<td>3–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>4–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>5–8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The **Keystones** are state end-of-course exams, given at various times throughout the school year. In 2013-14, students took Algebra I, Literature, and Biology Keystone exams (see the Web version of this report for Biology Keystone scores). Students may take the exams more than once. Keystone exams for other courses may be developed.

Scores for both PSSA tests and Keystone exams are rated “Advanced” (above grade level), “Proficient” (at grade level), “Basic” (not consistently at grade level), or “Below Basic” (below grade level).

A small number of students who receive special education services take an alternate test.

**Key dates for school choice**

*When to register your child for a magnet or a Career and Technical Education program in the Pittsburgh Public Schools*

Registration for magnet and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs takes place the year before a child enters the school or program.

**Deadline for registration: December 12, 2014**

Applications for Pittsburgh CAPA 6-12 closed on October 24.

**Note:** A child who attends a Pittsburgh Public Schools Early Childhood program (preschool) has a better chance of being accepted into an elementary or K-8 magnet program. For more information about “preference” and the magnet/CTE application process, visit the district Web site at www.pps.k12.pa.us, or contact the parent hotline at 412-529-HELP or parenthotline@pghboe.net.

Information that reflects the **current year** as a service to readers includes:
- School names, names of principals/administrators, and contact information
- “English as a Second Language” program sites, magnet programs, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) program sites
- Building accessibility

The **Pittsburgh Online Academy 4-12** doesn’t appear in the report because it enrolls too few students for achievement information to be reported. Once again, we didn’t include any information about the district’s **special education schools** due to the lack of meaningful achievement indicators for groups of students with diverse special needs. (Test scores and proficiency levels we report for each school include all students who took the PSSA or Keystones, regardless of special education status.) For more information about special education, visit the district’s Web site (www.pps.k12.pa.us) or call the district’s Program for Students with Exceptionalities at 412-529-3132.

Changes that affect schools this year aren’t reflected here because the report is based on the 2013-14 school year.
year. Those changes include:

- Pittsburgh Montessori, previously a K-8 school, has become a K-5 school. It appears in the K-8 section with its current name.
- Propel Charter School Hazelwood opened this fall with grades K-4. It will be included in next year’s report.

The indicators of school progress were originally selected by an A+ Schools committee headed by Alan Lesgold, Ph.D., dean of the School of Education, University of Pittsburgh. This year, the indicators were developed with the help of Dr. Shula Nedley and the A+ Schools board and staff. We thank the Pittsburgh Public Schools for its cooperation in making data available.

Interpreting the report

This year, we have tried to offer readers more contextual information to provide a clearer picture of each school. Still, much of the report is based on test scores. We urge readers to approach test scores with caution. 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 isn’t a substitute for visiting schools and observing in classrooms. Many aspects of student learning and school quality can’t be translated into numbers. We hope readers will consider this report as a tool for framing further questions as they continue to seek information about the quality of our schools.

See pages 114-115 for more information about any indicator.

Be there. Join us and inspire kids to be in school.

Did you know?

Missing just two days of school a month, or 18 days in a school year, is enough to negatively impact student learning.

Students with poor school attendance in early years are more likely to fall behind in reading and math.

Join us! The Be There School Attendance Campaign is a coalition of school and community partners working together to improve school attendance. For more information: @betherepgh or Shauna.McMillan@uwac.org.
Executive summary

This executive summary provides an overall analysis of trends across public schools in Pittsburgh, based on data in this and previous A+ Schools reports. While this summary does not address every indicator, we hope it will help readers who want to take a closer look at progress. This year we are especially pleased to provide a richer and more detailed view. Considerably more data are available now compared to 10 years ago when this report was first published. We can now look systematically at how schools are equipped to improve student outcomes.

This summary seeks to address the following questions:
- What are the characteristics of the district and its schools?
- How well equipped are schools to improve student outcomes?
  - What financial resources are being invested in schools to fuel teaching and learning?
  - To what extent do students experience effective teaching, and to what extent do teachers experience positive teaching and learning environments?
  - Do students feel cared for and challenged? 
    Do they attend school regularly? Is there a relationship between suspensions and attendance?
- What has been the trend in academic achievement as measured by PSSA scores?
- To what extent are students reaching academic milestones: reading well by 3rd grade, taking algebra in 8th grade, passing the state Keystone exams?
- What progress has been made toward reducing the racial achievement gap?
- Is student achievement growing, according to value-added measures?
- To what extent are high school students being prepared for post-secondary education and training?

Findings for the 2014 Report to the Community

Characteristics of the district and its schools

Enrollment

This year, we report on 30 fewer schools and 8,000 fewer students compared to our first report, published 10 years ago. In the 2004-05 school year, the district enrolled a little over 34,000 children in a total of 84 schools. Today the district enrolls a little over 26,000 children in a total of 56 schools and early childhood centers.

The table below describes the general student population within each type of school configuration in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) in the 2013-14 school year. Compared to earlier years, the diversity of the PPS student population has increased, with higher percentages of both Hispanic and Asian students. The percentage of students eligible for free/reduced lunch (a measure of family poverty) is more than three points higher than in 2011-12 (71.3% vs. 75%).

The chart on page 11 shows that district enrollment has also increased slightly, with the largest increases at the high school level, and slight increases in the elementary and middle grades.

Student demographic information at each grade level configuration for 2013-14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of schools</th>
<th>Average enrollment</th>
<th>Range of enrollment</th>
<th>Percent black</th>
<th>Percent white</th>
<th>Percent multi-ethnic</th>
<th>Percent Asian</th>
<th>Percent Hispanic</th>
<th>Percent eligible for free/reduced lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>108 to 1374</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>108 to 533</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>240 to 783</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>180 to 577</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>459 to 919</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1059</td>
<td>725 to 1374</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching

The chart below shows two indicators related to instruction: teacher performance levels and teacher survey responses. We looked at these indicators by school configuration.

The vast majority (96%) of PPS teachers have performed at “Proficient” or “Distinguished” levels over the past year, and we find distinguished teachers in every school and configuration. The chart below shows distinguished teachers by grade configuration.

Each year, PPS teachers are asked to complete the district’s Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey. The chart shows the percentage of teachers in 2014 who agreed with the statement, “Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.” Elementary and middle schools had the highest levels of agreement, while 6-12 schools had the lowest.

Resources

The chart below shows the average amount spent per student from each school’s site-based budget*, by school configuration. The chart shows that the largest investments were made at 6-12 and middle schools, and the smallest were made at high schools. In the next chart, we show the same information by school size. The largest investments were made at the smallest schools, those with fewer than 300 students.

* Site-based budgets don’t include special education, ESL education, maintenance, security, utilities, or transportation.
School climate

Student attendance and suspensions
The chart below shows the percentage of students who were chronically absent (missing more than 18 school days, or more than 10% of the entire school year) and the percentage of students who were suspended at least once, by school configuration. The chart shows:

- Middle schools have the highest suspension rates at 32%, with high schools at 31%.
- High schools have the highest rate of chronic absenteeism, with 43% of students absent more than 18 days.

Academic achievement

PSSA: PPS compared to PA
We looked at PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) achievement trends for all PPS students and all students in Pennsylvania, from 2010-11 to 2013-14, in Reading and Math. The chart below shows that scores declined in both the state and the district. The district’s decline was larger in all grades except 6-8 Math. Eleventh grade comparisons aren’t possible here because in 2012, the 11th grade PSSA was replaced with the Keystone exams. Our analysis looks at the four-year trend, although readers should note that overall scores increased from 2013 to 2014.

Student experience
Twice a year PPS students are surveyed about their classroom experiences. The Tripod Student Survey asks students to agree/disagree with statements in seven areas, or “dimensions.” The chart below shows the percentage of students who agreed and strongly agreed with statements within the “Care” and “Challenge” dimensions. An example of a “Care” statement is “My teacher really tries to understand how students feel about things.” An example of a “Challenge” statement is “My teacher wants us to use our thinking skills, not just memorize things.” These two dimensions of the survey have been found to be most correlated with student achievement.

We looked at student responses by grade span (3-5, 6-8, etc.). The chart shows that student agreement declines over time, with the highest rate of agreement in grades 3-5 and the lowest rate of agreement in grades 9-12.

Fundraiser Results by Salesperson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>K-5 SCHOOLS</th>
<th>K-8 SCHOOLS</th>
<th>MIDDLE SCHOOLS</th>
<th>6-12 SCHOOLS</th>
<th>9-12 SCHOOLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel challenged 3-5</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel cared for 3-5</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel challenged 6-8</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel cared for 6-8</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chronic absenteeism and suspension by school configuration

- K-5 schools
- K-8 schools
- Middle schools
- 6-12 schools
- High schools

Chronic absenteeism rate
Overall suspension rate

Percent change in PSSA scores 2010-2014

PPS and state

Percent of students who reported being challenged and cared for, by grade span
PPS achievement on academic milestones

We have articulated three milestones for academic achievement: 3rd grade reading; 8th grade algebra; and proficiency in literature, algebra, and biology as shown on the Keystone exams. (Visit the report Web site for school-by-school Biology Keystone performance: aplusschools.org/2014-report.) The chart on the right shows:

- 54% of PPS 3rd graders are reading at grade level or above, as shown by PSSA scores.
- 68% of PPS 11th graders have scored Proficient or Advanced (passing) on the Literature Keystone Exam, a graduation requirement.
- 50% of PPS 8th graders who took the Algebra 1 Keystone passed the exam with Proficient or Advanced performance, compared to 53% of 11th graders who took the exam. The Algebra Keystone is a graduation requirement.
- 33% of PPS 11th graders achieved a passing grade on the Biology Keystone exam, which is not a graduation requirement.

We also looked at the numbers of students who took algebra in 8th grade in each K-8, 6-8, and 6-12 school, as a percentage of the school’s total 8th graders. Those percentages ranged from 0% (five schools) to 100% (one school).

Black student achievement and the black/white achievement gap

Black and white Proficient/Advanced students, district and state trends

We looked at the PPS achievement gap in two ways: by comparing the percentages of white students who were Proficient/Advanced on the PSSA with Proficient/Advanced black students, and by comparing both groups to the state. The charts below and on page 14 show these gaps from 2006-07 to 2013-14. The information represents 3rd through 8th grades for all students across the district in Reading and Math, and all students whose scores were reported across the state.

continued on p.14
These graphs show:

- In general, PPS students follow the state’s trajectory, with similar gaps.
- Scores for both the district and the state peaked in 2011, and the gap narrowed.
- Scores dipped statewide in 2012 and 2013. In 2014, PPS black students’ scores rose more than black students across the state in both Math and Reading. In Math, black PPS students outperformed black students in the state.
- Since 2006, the gap between black and white achievement in PPS has narrowed by two points in Math and three points in Reading.

### 9-year Math gap

These graphs show the 9-year Math gap for different age groups:

- **2006:**
  - PPS black: 77%
  - PA black: 75%
  - PPS white: 81%
  - PA white: 77%

- **2007:**
  - PPS black: 79%
  - PA black: 75%
  - PPS white: 82%
  - PA white: 79%

- **2008:**
  - PPS black: 81%
  - PA black: 78%
  - PPS white: 85%
  - PA white: 82%

- **2009:**
  - PPS black: 85%
  - PA black: 81%
  - PPS white: 85%
  - PA white: 84%

- **2010:**
  - PPS black: 84%
  - PA black: 81%
  - PPS white: 85%
  - PA white: 75%

- **2011:**
  - PPS black: 60%
  - PA black: 59%
  - PPS white: 54%
  - PA white: 46%

- **2012:**
  - PPS black: 59%
  - PA black: 55%
  - PPS white: 54%
  - PA white: 46%

- **2013:**
  - PPS black: 55%
  - PA black: 50%
  - PPS white: 46%
  - PA white: 51%

- **2014:**
  - PPS black: 46%
  - PA black: 45%
  - PPS white: 51%
  - PA white: 51%

**Growth as determined by Value Added Measures**

While changes in percentages of Proficient/Advanced students show school and district-level change from year to year and provide important points for comparison, those changes do not show whether or not students have improved over time. “Value Added Measures” (VAM) does provide this information by measuring growth. VAM, which is calculated by Mathematica Policy Research, estimates each school’s contribution to student academic growth, and compares it to that of other schools in the state. (See page 16 for more information about VAM.)

The chart below shows the number of schools whose contribution to student achievement growth is either below, near, or above the state average, for each school configuration, in Reading and Math. The chart shows more schools at or above the state average in Reading compared to Math. In both subjects, more K-5 schools showed contributions to student growth than other school configurations.

### Achievement gaps in schools

The table on page 13 shows the number of schools with achievement gaps of 10 points or less by grade configuration. For this indicator, we included charter schools. The table shows that 15 schools, including four charter schools, have gaps of less than 10 points in Math, twice the number of schools with this distinction in 2012. Eight schools, including two charters, have gaps of less than 10 points in Reading, a decrease of one school since 2012.
Post-secondary readiness

We looked at three indicators to describe post-secondary readiness: graduation rate, percentage of students qualifying for the Pittsburgh Promise by grade point average, and percentage of students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) and Center for Advanced Studies (CAS) courses.

- In 2013 (the most recent year available), the district’s graduation rate was 77%. The rate in 2011 was 69%. Therefore, the graduation rate has increased by eight points.
- 48% of the district’s seniors overall earned grade point averages that qualified them for the Pittsburgh Promise scholarship program (2.5 or higher), 10 percentage points lower than in 2012. The disparity between black and white students has increased, with qualifying white seniors declining from 77% to 73% (a drop of four points), and qualifying black seniors declining from 39% to 28% (a drop of 11 points).
- Districtwide, 41% of students enrolled in one or more AP course, 26 percentage points higher than in 2012. This percentage increase includes both black and white students.

Closing

The Pittsburgh Public Schools serves an increasingly diverse student body, a trend that is likely to continue. Our public schools have seen increases in poverty rates as well. As a result, the district recently qualified and began participating in a federal universal free lunch program.

Although the four-year trends in academic achievement show declines for 3rd through 8th grades in both PPS and the state, PPS students gained in 2014, while the state did not. When compared to 2006, achievement gaps have narrowed slightly within the district, and scores for white and black students have increased slightly (except white Reading). We continue to see wide variation in performance across schools. Eight schools have an achievement gap in Reading that is lower than ten points, and a growing number of schools (14) narrowed the achievement gap in Math to less than ten points.

Graduation rates have increased, as have the percentage of students participating in advanced courses. The percentage of students qualifying for the Pittsburgh Promise by grade point average has declined for the third year in a row.

We know readers are as curious as we are about what contributes to gains as well as persistent low achievement in our schools. There is no single answer. In the coming months, A+ Schools will publish several short briefs that explore relationships among academic achievement and some of the new indicators we report here. For example, is there a relationship between small schools and academic attainment? How is teacher performance linked to academic achievement and growth? Are chronic absenteeism and suspensions related to achievement? Are student reports of care and challenge related to attendance and/or achievement? To learn more, read our blog at aplusschools.org, or email us at info@aplusschools.org to sign up for our email newsletter.

We hope this report motivates readers to act. Please consider what you can do, by becoming a tutor, a middle school mentor, a classroom volunteer, an investor, and/or an advocate for change. Visit our Web site at www.aplusschools.org for more information on how you can get involved.

Methodology

The executive summary analysis was conducted using data in the full report and previous reports, as well as additional public data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Web site. These data were collected from the Pittsburgh Public Schools, PDE, and other sources (see “Definitions and sources”). The executive summary findings were developed by Shula Nedley, Ph.D., of Dr. Shula Nedley Consulting.