2017 Report to the Community
on Public School Progress in Pittsburgh

Your guide to our public schools.

www.aplusschools.org
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The artwork on the front cover, “Work Together,” was created by Arianna Mcdonald, a 4th grader at Pittsburgh Arsenal PreK-5 last year. Arianna was the first-place winner of our Your Art, Our Schools cover competition. The artwork on the back cover, “Ready for School,” was created by our second-place winner, Kedren Taylor, a 5th grader at Pittsburgh Phillips K-5 last year. Photography by Greg Blackman.

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How to use this report

This report is intended to provide you with common, accessible information about Pittsburgh Public Schools and the city’s 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 that you can use the information presented here, as a parent or caregiver and/or a concerned citizen.

1. **Parents/caregivers:** If you have a child in school, ask the principal, a teacher, or your school board member for more information about the data reported here.

High-performing schools focus on student outcomes and hold students to high expectations. You might ask these questions about **student achievement**:
- How do you monitor student achievement?
- What strategies are in place to make sure students make at least a year’s worth of growth?
- How do you help children who are falling behind?
- What is being done to address chronic absenteeism?
- How does the school keep students on track for the Pittsburgh Promise college scholarship? How do you help students plan for their lives after graduation?
- Which students have access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses?

High-performing schools have principals who coach and support teachers to help them improve. You might ask these questions about **instructional leadership**:
- What is being done to ensure that each child is benefiting from excellent teaching?
- How do you help teachers improve? What is the area of focus for this year?
- How do you support new teachers and keep effective teachers? How do you know that your system is working?
- How do you monitor student suspensions? What kinds of interventions or supports do you provide for students who need them?

High-performing schools engage students, their families, and their communities, providing meaningful ways for all to be involved in students’ success. You might ask these questions about **parent/caregiver engagement**:
- What parent organization can I join to be more involved in the school? (If the school doesn’t have one, contact A+ Schools to see if we can help you start one!)
- What are all the ways that parents can be involved in the school?

2. **Community organizations:** If you work for a community organization, consider how you can contribute to the success of a school. Strong communities include strong schools. 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. **Volunteers:** Connect with a school near you to find opportunities to mentor, tutor, or volunteer in other ways.

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

If you’d like to share your views on this report, 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.

For more information, visit [www.aplusschools.org/2017-report](http://www.aplusschools.org/2017-report).
Five ways A+ Schools makes a difference

A+ Schools works with the community to improve excellence and equity in our schools. We are only as strong as the staff, parents, students, volunteers, and donors who support our work. With you, we continue to 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 advocate for equitable and excellent public schools.

We work with parents, students, teachers, administrators, and others to advocate for a strong public school system that is fully accountable, fiscally responsible, and focused on providing a high quality education for all students.

- A+ Schools is part of the Campaign for Fair Education Funding, a state-wide coalition with more than 50 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.

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.

- Over the past year, we engaged more than 1,250 people in person at neighborhood, community, and school events, with tens of thousands more exposed to our work through mailings and social media.

- 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. Last year, Parent Nation volunteers spent 13,607 hours volunteering in schools, mostly serving as classroom aides and monitors. This past summer, A+ Schools hired three new parent organizers who will work with parents throughout the city, thus broadening our reach beyond individual schools to communities at large.

- After nearly two years of hard work and persistent engagement led by our parent volunteers, our School Nurse Campaign won a commitment from the district to hire more full-time nurses to staff every school building, every day.

- TeenBloc brings together high school students from across Pittsburgh to participate in leadership development and community organizing aimed at improving public education in the city. In the past year, TeenBloc participants:

  - Led teach-ins and engaged their fellow students in discussions about the school-to-prison pipeline and restorative practices (an alternative to suspension that focuses on rebuilding relationships after students have offended)

  - Organized an art event around the “Let’s Get Free” gallery show at BOOM Concepts to provide an opportunity for students to discuss ways to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline

  - Trained 18 high school students from across the city in organizing skills during a week-long summer Youth Organizing Academy

- This past spring, more Pittsburgh residents voted in the primary elections for school board races compared to previous years as a result of our Vote School Board First Campaign. Organized by a coalition of community-based organizations and partners and led by A+ Schools, the Campaign informed voters about issues facing the district and the important role of the school board. Over 10,000 registered voters received mailed candidate guides and volunteers knocked on more than 2,000 doors to talk to voters about school board elections. Our candidate forum was attended by more than 100 people and watched online by more than 700 others, including viewers who watched a version that was live-translated into Spanish.
• 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. Look for a revised, expanded version of Board Watch to roll out in December.

3. **We collect and report critical data.**

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

• This annual **Report to the Community** provides detailed information so families can monitor progress in each of Pittsburgh’s public schools (district and charter), and make informed decisions on their choices of schools. Last year, we distributed over 35,000 copies of the report and engaged over 600 people at school and community presentations.

• 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.

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 key findings and determine priorities.

• In the past year, we have provided community research briefs, presentations, and city-wide meetings about **restorative practices** to help raise awareness and support for policies and practices that improve school climates and cultures. This past summer, A+ Schools and the Pittsburgh Black Elected Officials Coalition hosted a discussion on the use and effectiveness of restorative practices with panelists from the Education Law Center, Pittsburgh Public Schools, and the District of Columbia Public Schools. Over 150 people attended and another 250 viewed it online.

• Throughout our 13-year history, we have kept an eye on the educational landscape and kept you informed when big changes were 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.

• We provide **regular updates** on news and research through our social media presence on Facebook ([facebook.com/aplusschoolsfans](http://facebook.com/aplusschoolsfans)) and Twitter (@aplusschools). We email over 8,500 subscribers with updates on critical issues, events, and news of interest. When there’s an issue of critical community importance, we directly mail, canvass, and call residents to have a conversation about equity and excellence in our public schools. **You can sign up for regular updates at www.aplusschools.org.**

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.

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**We advocate for equitable and excellent public schools, mobilize the community, collect and report critical data, keep you informed, and inspire community action.**

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For more information, visit [www.aplusschools.org/2017-report](http://www.aplusschools.org/2017-report).
Are there hidden hazards in your child’s school?

The science is clear: lead and radon impact a child’s development, growth, and learning. These hidden hazards also affect faculty and staff. That’s why we’ve developed the 1000 Hours a Year Project. It’s designed to provide free resources for testing and remediation, technical assistance, and funding to help improve the environments where your children learn throughout Allegheny County.

Take action: 1000HoursaYear.org

The 1000 Hours a Year Project is made possible through generous funding from The Heinz Endowments and talented staff from Women for a Healthy Environment’s Healthy Schools PA and Green Building Alliance’s Green and Healthy Schools Academy.
Five things every parent should know about safe and healthy school environments

1. Understand the issue.
Healthy schools make for healthy learning. A healthy learning environment is one that provides the best opportunity for focus, attention, and well-being. Healthy learning environments are clean, dry, quiet, well lit, and comfortably warm or cool, with ample fresh air, and free from environmental hazards. Children spend on average 1000 hours in the classroom. Let’s ensure those hours are free from exposures that could impact their health.

2. Test for lead (then fix it).
Lead exposure can cause serious damage to developing brains. Lead can be found in places like paint, dust, soil, and water. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), there is no safe level of lead exposure in children. The AAP advocates for legal requirements that would ensure lead concentrations in the water in school fountains do not exceed more than 1 part per billion. While not required, many Pittsburgh area schools have performed testing on lead in drinking water. Has yours? See PPS water testing results here: https://www.pghschools.org/qualityH2O.

3. Test for radon (then fix it).
Radon, an odorless and colorless gas, is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the US. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, nearly one in five classrooms has actionable levels of radon. Most schools, however, have not tested for radon. Ask your school personnel if radon testing has been completed. If elevated levels are found, it can be fixed!

4. Know all the risks.
Health risks can be found in every learning environment. Along with lead and radon, consider cleaning products, idling buses, mold, and artificial turf. Potential environmental hazards can be found in classrooms, on playgrounds, and throughout school systems. Ask if your school is addressing these risks.

5. Make a difference.
Get involved in knowing the environmental health of your school. Throughout Pittsburgh, resources are available to help your school community become more informed and take action. A good place to start is the 1000 Hours a Year Project, which is committed to providing resources for schools to test and address lead and radon. Visit 1000HoursAYear.org and tap into a local team that is ready to help.

The 1000 Hours a Year Project is made possible through generous funding from The Heinz Endowments, and talented staff from Women for a Healthy Environment’s Healthy Schools PA and Green Building Alliance’s Green and Healthy Schools Academy. The Healthy Schools Working Group includes those organizations, A+ Schools, and the Environmental Charter School at Frick Park.
Introduction

This year’s publication of our annual Report to the Community marks a new direction at A+ Schools: from watchdog to advocate. In 2002, three major Pittsburgh foundations withdrew financial support from the school district, prompting then mayor Tom Murphy to establish the Commission on Public Education to make recommendations for addressing the root causes of this vote of no confidence. The Commission’s report called for the formation of an organization to provide the leadership needed for school reform. A+ Schools became that organization. Since then, we have provided oversight with the goal of ensuring that our school district was living up to its promise to provide a high quality education to all of its students.

Recently, however, we realized that A+ Schools has moved beyond its original intent, evolving into an organization that includes many more voices, and taking steps to educate, train, and mobilize the district’s constituents (including students) to become advocates for school reform. As part of that shift, the organization has adopted new strategic approaches for working with community activists and district personnel to (1) boost overall achievement rates, (2) attain a 100 percent graduation rate in all 6-12 and 9-12 schools, (3) ensure that 80 percent of students complete formal postsecondary certificate or degree programs, and (4) establish an environment in which race is not a determinant factor in student outcomes.

A+ Schools continues to be guided by the belief that Pittsburgh can provide a world-class public education, with schools that have high standards, great teaching and instructional leaders, and equitable opportunities for every student. This belief is the backbone of our advocacy agenda, which will address three goals this year:

- Students will have effective teachers and more inclusive learning environments.
- Gifted education experiences will be more accessible and equitable.
- Our schools will be more restorative (focused on rebuilding relationships after students have offended, rather than suspending them) and less punitive.

Our advocacy agenda is closely related to the district’s five-year strategic plan, Expect Great Things, which draws in part on recommendations in a report commissioned by the district from the Council of the Great City Schools. The Expect Great Things Plan highlights several areas of interest to A+ Schools, including closing the racial achievement gap, improving teacher professional development, and implementing restorative practices. In addition, A+ Schools reconfigured each of our programs—Parent Nation, TeenBloc, Board Watch, and School Works—to be more proactive and to better engage with our stakeholders. These programs will focus on building skills and strengthening the power of our community members. Through a direct engagement and training approach, we hope to build upon the successes that we have seen over the past year, which included:

- A commitment by Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) to hire full-time nurses to staff every school, every day, as a result of our School Nurse Campaign
- More voters casting ballots in school board races, as a result of our Vote School Board First Campaign
- Seven restorative practices workshops attended by nearly 300 people

What are the PSSA tests and Keystone exams?

The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, or PSSA, is the state test for 3rd through 8th graders. Testing takes place in the spring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSSA content area</th>
<th>Grades tested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Language Arts (ELA) &amp; Math</td>
<td>3–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>4, 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Keystones are state end-of-course exams, given at various times throughout the school year. In 2016-17, students took Algebra I, Literature, and Biology Keystone exams. Students may take the exams more than once. Keystone exams for other courses may be developed by the state.

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.
At the center of all we do is our students, and we will advocate for programs and policies that improve their options now and in the future. We will continue to call attention to persistent gaps in opportunities and student achievement. And we will continue to provide the key research, analysis, and engagement you have come to rely on.

What’s in the report?

This report is organized around equity indicators that research has identified as important for achievement and growth. On our school pages, we identify and highlight data about teaching, student academic growth, school climate, and readiness. Rather than including all test results, we report on “key indicators”: 3rd grade reading proficiency, 8th grade algebra taking, and Keystone Exam achievement. 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.

This year marks the third year of reporting results on the revised Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests, given in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics in 3rd through 8th grades. Usually, when we report trends, we provide four years of data. Because the older version of the PSSA isn't comparable to the new version, we only report PSSA scores for the new test (2015-17).

Again this year on the school pages, we report academic growth as measured by PVAAS—the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System. PVAAS reports on whether or not a school met the state’s standard for growth in PSSA and Keystone achievement: at least a year’s worth of growth in scores for a year’s worth of schooling. PVAAS is reported for public schools across the state. Therefore, it allows us to look at district schools and charter schools using the same measure.

The report contains data for all of the charter schools within the city. (Charter schools are public schools operated independently of school districts.) This year, we include Provident Charter School, which opened last year. We thank the schools for providing information.

As we did last year, we provide basic information about the district’s special education centers and the Hill House Passport Academy Charter School, all of which serve special populations of students (page 92). Due to the lack of meaningful achievement indicators for groups of students with diverse special needs at these schools, we do not provide additional information. This year, we have grouped Pittsburgh Online Academy with these schools, although it is a regular education school. (Its small class sizes and other unique features mean we are unable to report much of the data we report for other schools.)

The report contains much additional information beyond the school pages. On the comparison chart pages (17-21), readers can compare schools of different types and view additional indicators, such as each school’s site-based budget.

Please note: while the district spent $23,510.96 per pupil in 2015-16 based on its Average Daily Membership according to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), we are only able to provide each school’s site-based budget, as many of the school-based costs of educating students are not accounted for at the school level by PPS. The charts also include a measure of how students rated their teachers, based on a national survey that allows us to report how each school compares to national rankings.

On page 22, we offer a brief summary of the Every Student Succeeds Act, federal legislation passed during the Obama Administration that aims to make educational opportunities more equitable for all students. On page 23, we report the
state’s **School Performance Profile** data for PPS and charter schools. The School Performance Profile assigns each school a number based on state test scores, academic growth, and other data. For more information, visit the PDE Web site at www.education.pa.gov.

We have also included a call to action from the **Healthy Schools Working Group**, which includes A+ Schools (pages 6 and 7).

Again this year, the report includes an **executive summary**. The executive summary, beginning on page 11, 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 **2016-17** school year
- Comparisons of each school with district averages
- Achievement information: how each school measures up to state “proficiency” levels on PSSA tests and Keystone exams
- Information about each level (K-5, K-8, 6-8, 6-12, and 9-12) on the cover page of each section, along with comparable state data
- An index of schools grouped by region (page 120)

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 **indicators of school progress** were originally selected by an A+ Schools committee headed by Alan Lesgold, Ph.D., dean emeritus of the School of Education, University of Pittsburgh. The indicators in our revised report (starting in 2014) 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.

**Reporting by race and economic disadvantage**

Readers may wonder why we report some test results by students’ race and economic disadvantage, when research has shown that the quality of teaching is the most important school-based 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, this past spring, Pittsburgh Public Schools unveiled its five-year strategic plan that included an emphasis on eliminating the racial achievement gap. Over time, 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**

With this report, 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.

This report isn’t a substitute for visiting schools and observing in classrooms. We hope readers will consider the 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.
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 and take action to address areas of concern. As this is our twelfth edition, considerably more data are available now compared to when this report was first published. We can look systematically at how schools are equipped to improve student outcomes and use federal law to advocate for community involvement in demanding such improvements.

In this summary, you’ll learn:

- The characteristics of the district and its schools
- How well equipped schools are to improve student outcomes:
  - The financial resources invested in schools to fuel teaching and learning
  - The extent to which students experience effective teaching, and whether teachers experience positive teaching and learning environments
  - Whether students attend school regularly, and the relationship between suspensions and attendance
- How the academic achievement of black and white students in the district compares with black and white students across the state as measured by PSSA tests and Keystone exam scores
- The extent to which students reach academic milestones: reading well by 3rd grade, taking algebra by 8th grade, and graduating ready for college and career as measured by the Keystone exams
- Whether students are growing academically, according to value-added measures

Findings for the 2017 Report to the Community

Characteristics of the district and its schools

Enrollment

The table below describes the general student population within each type of school configuration in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) in the 2016-17 school year. Compared to last year, the diversity of the PPS student population has remained about the same. The rate of economically disadvantaged students rose by 10 percentage points.

Student demographic information at each grade-level configuration for 2016-17

<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 economically disadvantaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>170 to 1,469</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>190 to 533</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>189 to 903</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>170 to 474</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>387 to 944</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>439 to 1,469</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key takeaways

- 3rd grade reading scores increased by 8 points.
- The district’s graduation rate increased by 10%.
- 68% of district schools met or exceeded state growth standards in English Language Arts (ELA).
- 46% of district schools met or exceeded state growth standards in Mathematics.

For more information, visit www.aplusschools.org/2017-report.
Enrollment change by grade level

The chart on the right shows that district enrollment decreased significantly over the past four years. Enrollment in the district is down 2,437 students since the 2013-14 school year.

Teaching

The charts in this section show indicators related to instruction: teacher performance levels (which are derived from observation of teaching practice, student perceptions, and student learning and growth data) and teacher survey responses. We looked at changes between 2014-15 and 2016-17.

The chart on the right shows that the vast majority (99%) of PPS teachers performed at “Proficient” or “Distinguished” levels over the past year. Compared to last year, the overall percentage rose one percent. The percentage of teachers performing at the “Distinguished” level increased from 62% to 65%.

Each year, PPS teachers are asked to complete the district’s Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey. The chart on the right shows the percentage of teachers in 2015, 2016, and 2017 who agreed with the statement, “Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.” Middle schools continued to have the highest levels of agreement, while K-8 and 6-12 schools had the lowest.

School climate

Student suspensions and attendance

The chart on the right shows the percentage of students who were chronically absent (missing 10% or more of days they were enrolled in school) 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 23% (down from 28% last year), followed by high schools with a suspension rate of 22% (down from 30% last year). Compared to last year, suspension rates decreased by one percentage point for K-5, by three percentage points for K-8, and remained the same for 6-12 schools (21%). However, black students (53% of the total school population) still account for most of the total number of suspensions (77%)—a troubling finding.

- High schools have the highest rate of chronic absenteeism (44%). Compared to last year, the rates for chronic absenteeism increased slightly at all levels except 6-8 schools.
Resources

The chart below shows the average amount spent per student from each school’s site-based budget (including the Title I allocation), by percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged (a measure of family poverty; see “Definitions and sources of information” starting on page 118). Please note: while the district spent $23,510.96 per pupil in 2015-16 based on its Average Daily Membership (which includes Pittsburgh students enrolled in charter schools) according to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), we are only able to provide accurate figures for each school’s site-based budget (including the Title I allocation), as many of the school-based costs of educating students are not accounted for at the school level by PPS. The chart shows that the largest investments were made at schools falling within the top two quartiles of poverty (schools with 70% or more of students identified as economically disadvantaged). In the next chart, we show the same information by school size. As was the case last year, the largest investments were made at the smallest schools, those with fewer than 300 students.

Academic achievement

**PPS achievement on academic milestones**

The district’s strategic Expect Great Things Plan establishes goals for long-term outcomes, which include increasing proficiency in literacy and math for all students; equipping all students with skills to succeed in college, career, and life; and eliminating the racial disparity in achievement for black students. The chart below shows:

- 55% of PPS 3rd graders are reading at grade level or above, as shown by PSSA (PA System of School Assessment) ELA scores, an increase of 8 percentage points compared to last year. By comparison, 65% of the state’s 3rd graders achieved grade level performance.
- 64% of PPS 11th graders have scored Proficient or Advanced (passing) on the Literature Keystone Exam (their highest score by the end of 11th grade). 73% of the state’s 11th graders have scored Proficient or above on this exam.
- 53% of PPS 11th graders have scored Proficient or Advanced on the Algebra 1 Keystone Exam. This is an increase of 5 percentage points compared to last year. 66% of the state’s 11th graders have scored Proficient or Advanced on the Algebra 1 Keystone. 53% of PPS 8th graders who took the Algebra I Keystone passed with Proficient or Advanced performance.
- 42% of PPS 11th graders achieved a passing grade on the Biology Keystone Exam, a 10 percentage point improvement from last year. Statewide, 63% of 11th graders achieved a passing grade on the Biology Keystone.

We also looked at the numbers of students who took algebra by the end of 8th grade (including students who took algebra in 6th or 7th 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% (two schools) to 100% (one school).
PSSA and Keystone: PPS students compared to PA students, and the black/white achievement gap

We looked at 2017 achievement on PSSA ELA and Math tests, and Keystone Literature and Algebra I exams, for all black and white students in PPS and all black and white students in PA. We define the PPS/state gap as the difference between black student achievement in the district and white student achievement in the state. We looked at the gap by grade-level configuration.

The PSSA gap chart below shows gaps that range from 35 to 40 percentage points. Generally, black achievement in PPS paralleled black achievement in the state, and white achievement in PPS paralleled white achievement in the state, with PPS achievement being slightly lower in all cases except for math in grades 3-5. Compared to last year, there was little change for PPS except in grades 3-5 in ELA, which saw a six point improvement.

PSSA ELA and Math gaps

Keystone Literature and Algebra I gaps

The Keystone gap chart above shows a gap of 30 points for Literature, and a gap of 36 points for Algebra I when comparing black PPS students to white students in PA. On both exams, black PPS students scored slightly higher than black students in the state. White PPS students scored slightly higher on the Literature exam and slightly lower on the Algebra exam compared to white students in the state.
Achievement gaps in schools

We also looked at the achievement gap within PPS schools and within the city’s charter schools, which we define as the difference between black achievement at the school and white achievement at the district level on PSSA tests and Keystone exams. Five PPS schools and two charter schools had gaps of 10 points or less. A negative gap number indicates that black students in the school performed above the level of white students in the district.

Schools with achievement gaps of 10 points or less

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>PSSA ELA gap (Grades 3-5)</th>
<th>PSSA ELA gap (Grades 6-8)</th>
<th>PSSA Math gap (Grades 6-8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dilworth PreK-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton PreK-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenfield PreK-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Charter School K-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propel Charter School Hazelwood K-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>PSSA ELA gap (Grades 6-8)</th>
<th>PSSA Math gap (Grades 6-8)</th>
<th>Keystone Literature gap (Grade 11)</th>
<th>Keystone Algebra I gap (Grade 11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAPA 6-12</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sci-Tech 6-12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-14</td>
<td>-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Growth as determined by the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System

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 do provide this information by measuring the growth of groups of students from one year to the next.

We show this growth as measured by the PA Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS), which estimates each school’s contribution to student academic growth (see page 118 for more information).

The chart below shows the number of schools whose contribution to student academic growth is either above, near, or below the state’s average, for each school configuration, on English Language Arts and Math assessments in 2016-17.

**ELA/Literature PVAAS**

**Math/Algebra 1 PVAAS**

[continued on p. 16]
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 Centers for Advanced Study (CAS) courses. We calculated a graduation rate that is an average of the 6-12 and 9-12 schools included in this report. It does not include students who graduated from the Pittsburgh Online Academy 4-12, special schools and centers, or external programs. For these indicators, we can look back over four years to see the trend.

- In 2016 (the most recent year available), the four-year cohort graduation rate was 80%, an increase of three percentage points since 2012-13. For black students, the rate has improved by four percentage points since 2012-13. The 2016 gap between black and white students is eight percentage points.
- 66% of the district’s seniors overall earned grade point averages that qualified them for the Pittsburgh Promise scholarship (2.5 or higher). There is still a disparity between black and white students who qualified for the scholarship, with 83% of white students eligible, compared to 51% of black students.
- Districtwide, 31% of students in grades 9-12 enrolled in one or more AP course, an increase of 3 percentage points over last year. Pittsburgh Obama 6-12 students’ participation in International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program classes is included in the AP calculations because IB classes are also advanced classes.

Closing

Our goal is for our city’s schools to provide an excellent education for all students, with all students given access to the same rigorous opportunities. Compared to this goal, PPS is still a work in progress. With a new superintendent, strategic plan, and greater collaboration among the charter sector, we see public school leaders and educators who are focused on closing gaps in student achievement. They are providing a well-rounded education with access to STEM, arts programs, and library services; and transforming disciplinary practices to improve learning environments. Together, we hope to build on what’s working and continue to identify areas where we need to improve.

We encourage readers to act on the information presented in this report. 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 PDE and data from the Pittsburgh Public Schools. These data were collected from the Pittsburgh Public Schools, PDE, charter schools within the city, and other sources (see “Definitions and sources”). The executive summary findings were developed by Daniel Morrow.
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.