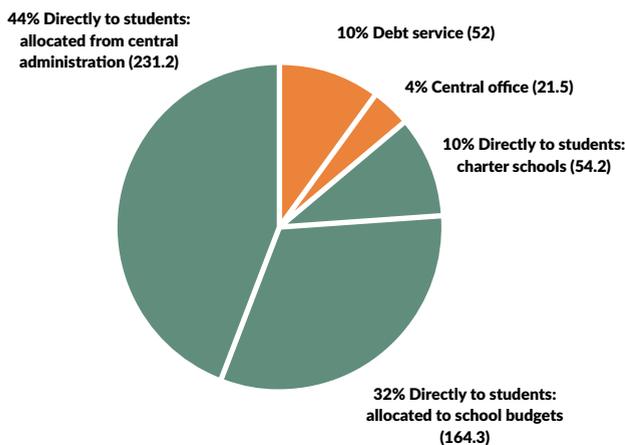


Equitable funding: Why it matters

A+ Schools' vision is a district where 100% of students graduate and at least 80% of students go on to complete some sort of college or career training. We want schools that work for all children, and for race not to be a factor in student achievement or access to opportunities.

In order to get to this vision, we need to provide students with an equitable education: one that provides each student with the individual support he or she needs to reach and exceed a shared standard of success, which includes graduating from high school and completing post-secondary education or training.

Good news: PPS spends 86% of its total budget directly on students.



Percentage of 2014 PPS budget spent directly on students (in millions)

To get to equity, we advocate for a strategic allocation of resources that provides:

- Great teachers in every classroom
- Resources distributed based on student need
- Resources directed toward improving outcomes
- Access to opportunities to boost student learning such as arts, music, and world languages
- Differentiated supports that can help unlock the potential of each student

In order to create a strategy that will meet the needs of each of Pittsburgh's students, we need to know what resources we have to work with, how those resources are currently being allocated, and if resources are being spent in ways that maximize student achievement.

Unfortunately, we and the Board of Education of Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) cannot answer many of these questions. That must change.

Bad news: Less than half of the money spent on students is trackable down to the school building level.

Site-based budgets (trackable)	Central office (currently not trackable)
Average teacher salaries	Transportation
Principal salaries	Facilities and maintenance
Some supplies	School security
Small discretionary budget	Nurses
	Special education
	Other costs

Recommendations

As the district drives dollars out to schools it should focus on maximizing the impact of the resources it has to improve student academic achievement. To do this the district would need to:

1. Increase transparency.
2. Establish a fair funding formula at the district level.
 - *Establish a base cost of educating students:* Determine the cost to educate PPS students to the standards set for them.
 - *Count students:* Once base cost is established, dollars should go to schools based on school size.
 - *Add adjustments for students with greater needs:* A fair formula would then add weights for students with specific needs that require additional resources (such as students with exceptionalities, students who are economically disadvantaged, students who are homeless, and English language learners).
3. Prioritize student outcomes.
4. Provide greater autonomy to principals while holding them accountable for results.

From margin to center

Putting black girls at the center of the discourse of racial disproportionality in school discipline

By Pamela Little-Poole and Sarah Brown

Zero tolerance discipline policies were created to eliminate weapons and drugs from schools, yet they have been increasingly used as the *de facto* means to punish students for minor misbehaviors including tardiness and dress code violations, or subjective infractions like defiance of authority. Compelling evidence suggests that a decade of exclusionary discipline does not improve student behavior, school safety, or academic achievement. In fact, these punitive methods limit opportunities for students to learn and engage. They isolate, stigmatize, and push out an already vulnerable population of youth.

Students of color have been disproportionately impacted by these practices. In Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) last year, black students comprised 76% of all students who received at least one out-of-school suspension, but they only made up about half (53%) of the total student population. Black students were four times more likely than white students to be suspended.

While much of the research and discourse on racial disparities in school discipline have focused on black males, black females are also disproportionately impacted. According to the Office of Civil Rights Data Collection, during the 2011-12 school year, nationally, black female PreK-12 students were suspended at six times the rate of white girls and more than any other group of girls. In Pennsylvania, black female students were six-and-a-half times more likely than white females to be suspended at least once.

The disproportionality is visible within our local context as well. Black girls in PPS were suspended four times more often than white girls. By far, the highest disparity is seen in suspensions of students with disabilities. Approximately half of all black girls with disabilities who attend a PPS high school are suspended each year. In PPS high schools, black females with disabilities are suspended 13 times more often than white females with disabilities. In every PPS high school, black girls receive suspensions more frequently than white boys and white girls combined.

Students who are suspended just once in ninth grade are twice as likely not to graduate (Balfanz, 2013). Often, these students are labeled as dropouts. However, researchers have also begun to use the term “pushout.” While “pushout” and “dropout” both define students who leave school and fail to graduate, their connotations are different. A dropout

is an individual who quits school of her own accord. Dr. Monique Morris, author of *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls*, describes pushout as “beliefs, policies, and actions that degrade and marginalize both [black girls’] learning and their humanity, leading to conditions that push them out of schools and render them vulnerable to even more harm.”

What is the solution?

Dr. Morris recommends that schools revoke the “permission to fail” that has been granted to black girls. Fair, just, and effective alternatives to suspensions and expulsions are needed to ensure that black girls learn, achieve, and grow to their fullest potential.

- Schools must provide ongoing professional development that emphasizes reducing implicit bias and engages all staff in the school’s process of institutionalizing fair discipline policies.
- Students are the experts on their experiences and should be given opportunities to co-construct their school communities alongside staff and administrators.
- All school personnel should undergo cultural competency trainings which provide a framework of positive engagement strategies for students of color.
- Dress code policies must be revised and new ways of regulating student behavior developed that do not unfairly target black girls or facilitate their objectification.

For more information on pushout and other issues impacting black girls:

- *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected*, by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw.
- *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, by Monique W. Morris.
- *Unlocking Opportunity for African American Girls: A Call to Action for Educational Equity*, by Leticia Smith-Evans, Janel George, Fatima Goss Graves, Lara S. Kaufmann, and Lauren Frohlich.

If you are a concerned citizen, PPS parent, or a student who wants to work to reduce criminalizing pathways for students, join the Pennsylvania School Climate Coalition at www.elc-pa.org or contact us at www.aplsschools.org.

Safe & healthy school environments

By the Healthy Schools Working Group

Healthy schools make for healthy, happy and thriving children and adults.

Many factors contribute to the health and well-being of our children, both in and out of school. Research shows that environmental health—the effects that the environment has on human health—can negatively impact school attendance, academic achievement and the health of students with chronic illnesses.

I keep our school safe and healthy by ensuring that we have tested and eliminated lead in drinking water, and radon and PCBs in the air.

I keep our school safe and healthy by ensuring that all classrooms have ample fresh, clean air for everyone to breathe.

I keep our school safe and healthy by ensuring that school buses and other vehicles don't idle near the school.

When I'm in a safe and healthy school, I can breathe easy; my asthma doesn't keep me from learning or having fun.

I keep our school safe and healthy by ensuring buildings are free of both pests and dangerous pesticides.

I keep our school safe and healthy by using only healthy and green cleaning products and practices.

When grown-ups make my school safe and healthy, I know they really care about me and want me to be a happy and successful student.

To find out ways to make your school safer and healthier, visit safehealthyschool.org to learn more.

School administrators, parents, and students can find out more about how to promote healthy school environments by connecting with the Healthy Schools PA program www.HealthySchoolsPA.org/resources and the Green & Healthy Schools Academy greenandhealthyschoolsacademy.org. The Healthy Schools Working Group includes those organizations, A+ Schools, and The Environmental Charter School at Frick Park. Generous support has been provided by The Heinz Endowments.

Safe & healthy schools survey

You can help! Ask your principal if your school is implementing any of these practices. Share your answers at bit.ly/2016healthyschoolsurvey!

- Green cleaning
- Controlling mold & moisture
- Integrated pest management
- Managing air quality (from indoor & outdoor sources)
- Safe & natural field & playground surfaces
- Lead in drinking water testing & removal
- Radon testing & treatment
- Polychlorinated Biphenyl (PCBs) testing & removal