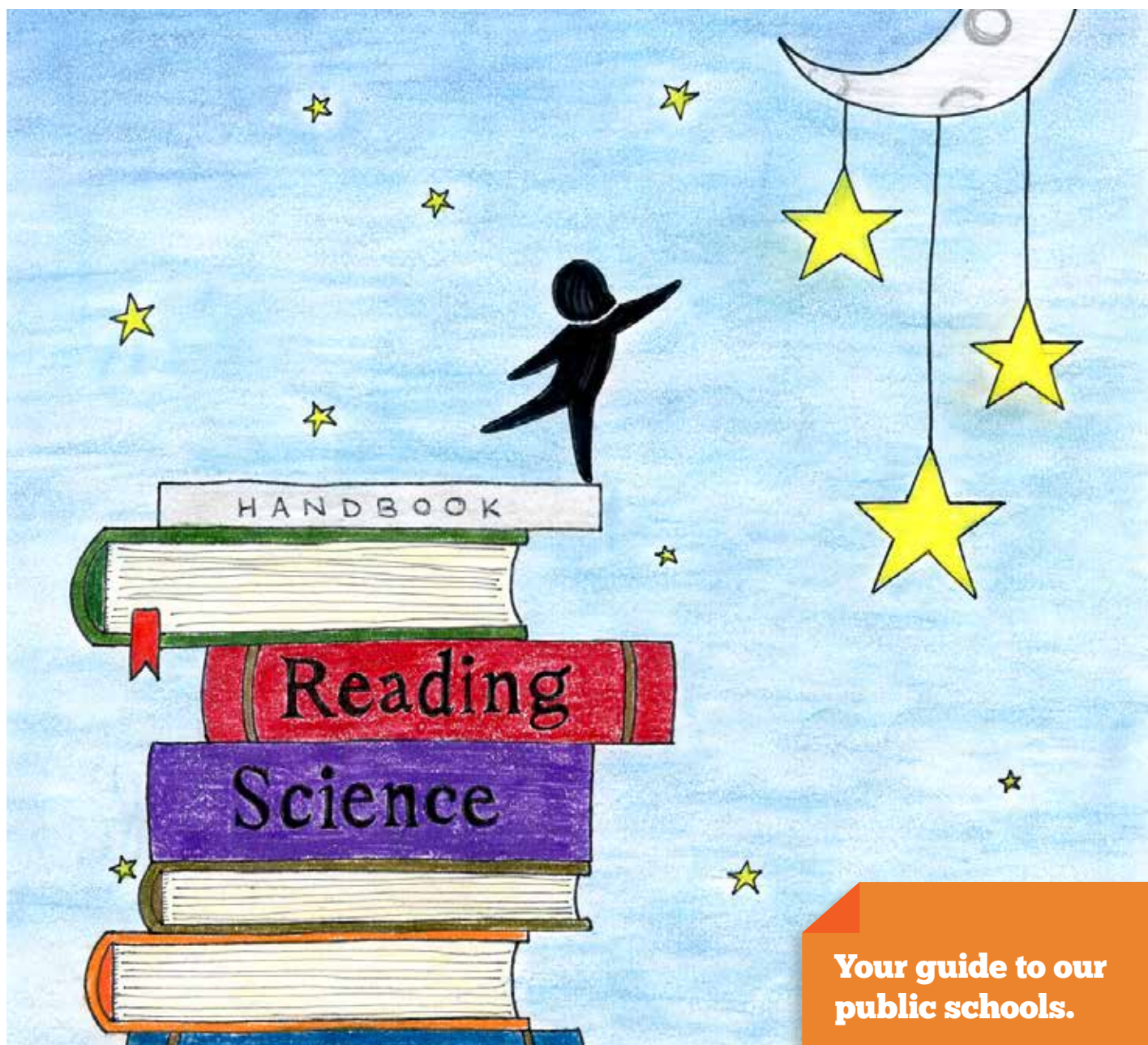


2015 Report to the Community on Public School Progress in Pittsburgh



Schools

Pittsburgh's Community Alliance for Public Education

www.aplusschools.org

A+ Schools

Pittsburgh's Community Alliance for Public Education

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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, "Reach for the stars, shoot for the moon," was created by Emily Leong, an 8th grader at Pittsburgh Colfax K-8 last year. Emily was the first-place winner of our first-ever **Your Art, Our Schools** cover competition. The artwork on the back cover, "Outside my school on the first day," was created by our second-place winner, Xander King, a 1st grader at Pittsburgh Brookline PreK-8 last year. For information about how to submit work to the 2015-16 cover competition, please contact James Fogarty at jfogarty@aplusschools.org or 412-697-1298. Photography by Greg Blackman.

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How to use this report

This report is intended to help you with common, accessible information about schools; to monitor school progress; and to define questions and identify areas where you need more information about the Pittsburgh Public Schools and/or the city's charter schools. Here are some ways that 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 for children who need them?
- 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?
- How do you help teachers improve their teaching? 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?
- 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, 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 about any aspect of the 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.

Your Art, Our Schools Cover Competition

We know that student art is flourishing in our schools, and we're looking for the best to feature on the covers of our next report. Any Pittsburgh Public Schools student or charter school student in the city is eligible to submit work by **January 22, 2016**. A panel of experts will select finalists, whose work will be displayed at a gallery. During the opening reception, the public will vote for first- and second-place winners. Winners and finalists will receive cash prizes. To submit your art for consideration, go to <http://bit.ly/yourartourschools>. For more information, please contact James Fogarty at jfogarty@aplusschools.org or 412-697-1298.

Five ways A+ Schools makes a difference

A+ Schools works with the community to focus on 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 focused on providing a high quality education for all students. Our work provides important oversight and helps ensure accountability at all of Pittsburgh's public schools.

- 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 60% of Board Watch recommendations over the past six-and-a-half years.
- 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.
- 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.

We keep watch over Pittsburgh's schools, mobilize the community, collect critical data, keep you informed, and inspire community action.

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.

- This past school year, parents contributed over 11,000 volunteer hours at schools through **Parent Nation**. In addition, we engaged more than 1,000 parents across 23 schools throughout the school year. Our school teams hosted more than 30 events and trainings to build school communities and to support parents' growth as leaders within the district. Trainings and workshops covered a variety of topics, including public speaking, grant writing, and bullying prevention. All of this hard work is paying off as we see improvements in the relationships and collaborations that exist between parents and school staff.
- **TeenBloc** brings together high school students from across Pittsburgh to participate in leadership development and student organizing aimed at creating positive change within Pittsburgh Public Schools. This past year, TeenBloc and the Black Political Empowerment Project registered 225 eighteen-year-olds to vote through an outreach campaign in PPS high schools. In addition, thanks in part to TeenBloc's advocacy, 22 schools will be implementing restorative practices (see page 8 for more information) with the help of a Department of Justice grant.
- 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 600 volunteers have interviewed over 300 school staff in the past six years.

3. We collect 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.

- 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 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, adoption of positive behavioral management plans, and reductions in some counselor caseloads.
- This past summer, we provided in-depth analysis on **school budgets** and **school climates** to help the public **better understand what we know** and what more we need to learn about how money is allocated and discipline impacts achievement.

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.

- We reached more than 10,000 likely voters with information about school board elections through our **voter education** work this past spring. We provided voter guides and policy information to voters through direct mail, community centers, and four candidate forums throughout the City.
- We engaged over 1,000 parents in trainings and events over the past year on topics ranging from bullying prevention to encouraging a mindset for growth, through our Parent Nation program.
- 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. Last year, we significantly revised the report to provide readers with critical information related to the equity issues we care about.
- Over 1,600 people have participated in citywide meetings to hear the findings of our School Works research. **School Works** reports are distributed to thousands each year.

- Every day we provide **regular updates** on news and research through our social media presence on Facebook (**facebook.com/aplusschoolsfans**) and Twitter (**@aplusschools**). On a bimonthly basis, we email to over 6,000 followers updates on critical issues, events, and news of interest. Finally, when there's an issue of critical community importance, we directly mail and canvass the community 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.

- **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, parents for whom English is a second language now have access to important school documents and can access the PPS Web site in their native tongue thanks to organizing conducted this past year by the Latino Parents United in Action, a group that is supported by A+ Schools and partners.
- In 2014, **TeenBloc** members made specific demands of district administration and the school board to include a **Student Bill of Rights** (see page 88) in the board's revisions to the Code of Student Conduct, and won that change.
- In 2014, 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 until 2017 and students in Pittsburgh are benefiting from teachers who receive accurate, reliable feedback for improvement and are held to high standards.

Healthy school environments

By the Healthy Schools Working Group

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 those with chronic illnesses**. Environmental factors that can affect human health include: chemicals in cleaning products, air fresheners, pesticides, school and art supplies, building materials, and furniture; legacy toxics, such as asbestos, lead, mercury, radon, and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls); mold and animal dander; quality and quantity of fresh air supply from outside; outdoor play areas; fine particles and toxic gases from vehicle exhaust, industrial pollution, and cigarette smoke; background noise and reverberation; and too little or too much lighting. Many of these environmental factors may be present in schools and can make learning more difficult. Short term exposure to certain environmental contaminants can cause acute illness or aggravate health conditions such as asthma. Prolonged exposure to radon can increase the risks of developing lung cancer. Children are also especially vulnerable to environmental contaminants as many of their organ systems are still developing through adolescence. Of particular concern is the impact of toxic chemical exposures on their neurological, respiratory, immune, and endocrine systems.

Students, parents, and community advocates are working to mitigate these negative environmental factors in schools in our region. Here are some questions to ask to begin to understand which of these factors are present in a school and what can be done to change the school environment.

What to look for:

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 supplies of clean, fresh air.

What to ask:

- *Do you have a “green cleaning policy”?*
Schools can implement cleaning practices that use non-toxic but equally effective products, and high efficiency equipment that reduces airborne dust.
- *How do you manage pests?*
Schools can institute processes, practices, and behaviors that prevent the need for dangerous pesticides, by reducing the ability of pests to find their way into schools looking for food, water, and shelter.
- *Are buses and other vehicles allowed to idle near or around the school?*
Schools can reduce unnecessary exposure to vehicle exhaust by putting strict limits on idling by buses and other vehicles, posting state-mandated signage, conducting training for drivers and school personnel, and encouraging the entire school community to be part of the solution.
- *What are the results of the most recent radon test?*
Radon is a colorless, odorless gas that is the second leading cause of lung cancer. Radon is prevalent in Western Pennsylvania. Schools should conduct radon testing at least once every five years in each room on the lowest level of the school and implement any necessary mitigation strategies.
- *How do you check or monitor indoor air quality?*
School staff can conduct regular building walkthroughs to identify and address basic indoor air quality issues such as air fresheners, moisture intrusion, foul odors, clogged air filters, or malfunctioning ventilation equipment. A school could establish an environmental health and safety team, which could monitor indoor air quality and respond to concerns on an ongoing basis.



For more information

School administrators, parents, and students can find out more about how to promote healthy school environments by connecting with the Green Building Alliance's Green & Healthy Schools Academy (<http://greenandhealthyschoolsacademy.org>) and Women for a Healthy Environment's Healthy Schools PA program (<http://healthyschoolspa.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.

Introduction

This year’s publication of our annual **Report to the Community** comes at a time of significant transition in Pittsburgh Public Schools. After the recent election, all but two Board of Education members have fewer than four full years of experience serving on the board. The superintendent, Dr. Linda Lane, has announced her retirement. Moreover, the district faces significant challenges caused by a state budget stalemate that has put our school finances in an even more precarious position. District leaders are also in the process of negotiating a collective bargaining agreement, the district’s single largest budget and policy document, with the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers (the teachers union).

You can count on A+ Schools to serve as an objective, reasoned community advocate during this transition. We provide thought leadership, research, policy analysis, and engagement opportunities on every pressing issue facing our schools—the school board and superintendent leadership, collective bargaining policies, and state and district budgeting, not to mention student discipline and related school-based practices.

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.

PSSA content area	Grades tested
Reading/Writing & Math	3–8
Science	4–8

The **Keystones** are state end-of-course exams, given at various times throughout the school year. In 2014-15, 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.

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.

We have provided training opportunities for all potential board members to provide them with the research and analysis tools they’ll need to make tough decisions that will benefit all students, especially our most vulnerable. With a host of partners, we have and will continue to engage the community in a broad, ongoing discussion about what we want to see from a new school leader (see our Web site for more information and how to get involved). We’re part of the Campaign for Fair Education Funding, a coalition of over 50 organizations. We have worked with other local organizations in our part of the state by organizing a bus trip to a Harrisburg rally, speaking at public hearings, and keeping the community informed about the need for an equitable state budget that gets more money to districts that need it most.

As the board and teachers union work out the details of the collective bargaining agreement, we’ll keep the community informed about the policies and practices governed by the agreement that will have an impact on equity and excellence in our schools. In all these arenas, we continue to stand for high expectations for students, as research both nationally and locally confirms that where standards and expectations are high, students rise to the challenge.

New PSSA this year

In addition to the changes in leadership and the other challenging issues facing our schools, this year marks the first year of results from the revised Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests. The tests, given in English Language Arts and Mathematics in 3rd through 8th grades, were revised to align with the state’s new academic standards, the Pennsylvania Core Standards (descriptions of what students should know and be able to do before they graduate). The 2015 PSSA included new and different content. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, more items tested problem solving and critical thinking skills, and required written responses. Some content is now being tested in an earlier school year. Also, the scores students need to earn to fall within the “Proficient” or “Advanced” score ranges have been adjusted to reflect more rigorous standards.

A note of caution: **2015 PSSA results are not comparable to prior years because of changes in the content tested and changes in score levels.** We continue to provide historical data about gaps in student achievement for your reference. However, if a school performed lower in 2015, it should not be seen as part of that school’s trend. Instead, 2015 should be viewed as a new benchmark year for the PSSA.

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 11, 2015

Applications for Pittsburgh CAPA 6-12 closed on October 28.

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.

What’s in the report?

Last year, we redesigned and reorganized this report around equity indicators that research has identified as important, and this year’s report maintains that focus. On our school pages, we identify and highlight data about *teaching, resources, school climate, and readiness*, such as chronic absenteeism (students absent 18+ days), student suspension rates (broken down by subgroup), parent and teacher responses to surveys about their schools, and the percentage of students who qualified for the Pittsburgh Promise scholarship. Please note: while the district spent \$21,753.84 per pupil in 2013-14 according to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, we are only able to provide accurate figures on spending based on 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 Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Rather than including all tests results, we report on “key indicators:” 3rd grade reading proficiency, 8th grade algebra taking, and Keystone Exam achievement by 11th grade. 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. On the comparison chart pages (15-19), readers can *compare schools of*

different types and view additional indicators, such as each school’s *value-added ratings* (a measure of growth).

This year, we’re not reporting student survey responses because we did not receive the data in a format that would be meaningful to readers. We hope to report these data in the future because student perceptions provide helpful information about classroom effectiveness. Based on student surveys administered in 2013-14, schools with more students who felt challenged and cared for by their teachers had better attendance, higher graduation rates, and more students attending college or trade school directly after graduation.

We have also included a report from the **Healthy Schools Working Group** (page 4), and a **short overview of Restorative Practices** (page 8), a set of practices designed to reduce suspensions and expulsions now being implemented in many schools thanks in part to the advocacy of TeenBloc students.

Once again, the report contains data for **the charter schools within the city**. (Charter schools are free, public schools operated independently of school districts.) We thank the schools for providing information. The school formerly called Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh Charter School has been renamed Urban Academy of Greater Pittsburgh Charter School. Propel Charter School Hazelwood appears in the report for the first time this year. The Hill House Passport Academy Charter School doesn’t appear in the report because it serves a special population: students under 21 years old who haven’t been able to finish their high school education.

Again this year, the report includes an **executive summary**. The executive summary, beginning on page 9, 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 **2014-15** 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
- 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)

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

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

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. The indicators in our revised report (starting last year) were developed with the help of Dr. Shula Nedley and the A+ Schools board and staff. We thank the Pittsburgh Public Schools and the PA Department of Education for their 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, initiatives and interventions led by Superintendent Linda Lane and the Pittsburgh Board of Education are designed to close the race and income achievement gaps and to raise achievement for students overall. 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

Beginning last 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.

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: @betherephg or Shauna.McMillan@uwac.org.

Call A+ Schools at 412-697-1298 to schedule a presentation on this report for your school, community group, or agency. We’ll review the report, explain how to use it, and answer your questions.

Art teachers: Please encourage your students to enter our Your Art, Our Schools Cover Competition by submitting their work to <http://bit.ly/yourartourschools> by January 22, 2016. Students may submit work they completed for assignments.

Please visit our Web site at www.aplusschools.org to support the publication of this report and our other programs and publications by donating to A+ Schools.

School discipline: Moving beyond zero tolerance to justice

The problem: Exclusionary discipline

In 2009-10, two million middle and high school students were suspended in the U.S. The vast majority of suspensions were for minor infractions (disrupting class, tardiness, and dress code violations). In Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS), the problem of exclusionary discipline (suspension or expulsion) has manifested in a variety of harmful and predictable ways:

- In 2011-12, PPS had the 5th highest out-of-school suspension rate in Pennsylvania (out of 500 districts) according to research conducted by the ACLU of Pennsylvania.
- In 2012-13, black students in PPS received 83% of total suspensions, even though they made up only 52% of all students in the district.
- And in 2013-2014, black students were four times more likely than white students to be suspended.
- Schools also vary greatly in how many suspensions they give. In 2012-13, one Pittsburgh school gave no suspensions, while another school suspended 79% of its students.

The American Academy of Pediatrics maintains that “out-of-school suspensions and expulsions are counterproductive to the intended goals necessary [to education], and should not be considered as appropriate discipline in any but the most extreme and dangerous circumstances, as determined on an individual basis rather than as a blanket policy.”

We know that exclusionary discipline has many negative long-term consequences. Just one suspension in 9th grade doubles the chance of a student dropping out (from 16% to 32%). Students who end up in the criminal justice system are more likely to have been suspended while in school. And finally, students who are not in class are less prepared for postsecondary education.

What's a solution? Restorative Practices

One of the most promising approaches to reducing school suspensions and increasing student engagement is restorative practices. Pittsburgh Public Schools is currently implementing restorative practices in 22 schools with funding from the Department of Justice.

The restorative practices approach proactively builds relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict, as well as addressing issues after they arise. Two key beliefs are central to implementing restorative practices in any school:

- Everyone is valued and is responsible for holding one another accountable to the collective values and principles that define the community.
- Participation is achieved through cooperation rather than coercion. In other words, people will make positive changes when those in positions of authority do things with them, not to them or for them.

Schools that implement restorative practices focus on five principles to do their work:

1. They acknowledge that relationships are central to building community.
2. They address misbehavior and harm in a way that strengthens relationships and focuses on harm done rather than only on rule-breaking.
3. They ensure equity of voice among all members of the community.
4. They engage in collaborative problem solving.
5. They encourage accountability and responsibility, and empower all members of the community to change and grow.

Where some form of these practices are in place in Pittsburgh Public Schools, we see lower suspensions and greater numbers of students who report feeling challenged academically.

If you are a concerned citizen, PPS parent or student who wants to eliminate zero tolerance practices in our schools and move toward justice:

- Get involved with your school.
- Join A+ Schools' Parent Nation or TeenBloc: www.aplusschools.org.
- Join the Pennsylvania School Climate Coalition: www.elc-pa.org.
- Join the Dignity in Schools Campaign: <http://dignityinschools.org/>.

Together, we can change our schools and create school climates that engage students and build strong relationships.

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. Considerably more data are available now compared to 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?
- How do black and white students in the district compare with black and white students across the state on academic achievement as measured by PSSA tests and Keystone exam scores?
- To what extent are students reaching academic milestones: reading well by 3rd grade, taking algebra in 8th grade, and graduating ready for college and career as measured by the Keystone exams?
- Are students growing academically, according to value-added measures?
- To what extent are high school students being prepared for post-secondary education and training?

Findings for the 2015 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 2014-15 school year. Compared to last year, the diversity of the PPS student population has remained about the same. Our former source for information about students' economic disadvantage was eligibility for free and

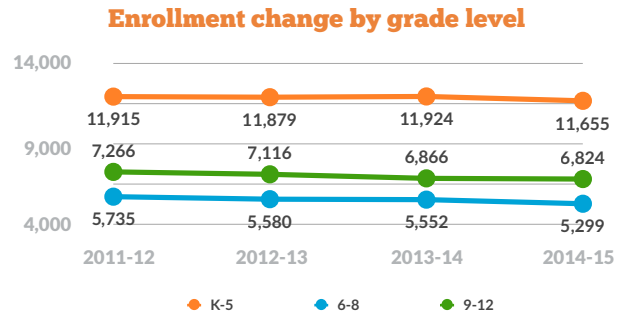
reduced-price lunch. PPS no longer collects free/reduced lunch applications because the district now provides free lunch to all students under the federal Community Eligibility Provision. This year, this information is based on the state's Direct Certification process, which may result in fewer students being identified as economically disadvantaged than in previous years.

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Student demographic information at each grade-level configuration for 2014-15

	Number of schools	Average enrollment	Range of enrollment	Percent black	Percent white	Percent multi-ethnic	Percent Asian	Percent Hispanic	Percent economically disadvantaged
District	50	456	103 to 1,355	53%	34%	7%	4%	2%	69%
K-5	23	330	103 to 535	55%	30%	8%	4%	3%	71%
K-8	11	510	203 to 820	52%	34%	9%	3%	2%	67%
6-8	7	305	163 to 506	51%	35%	7%	4%	3%	77%
6-12	5	677	453 to 959	62%	29%	6%	2%	2%	64%
9-12	4	1,021	560 to 1,355	43%	43%	5%	6%	3%	68%

The chart to the right shows that district enrollment has also decreased with larger decreases at the elementary and middle school levels, and a smaller decrease in the high school grades. (The chart reflects January enrollment and includes students attending special schools in the district that are not reported in this book.)

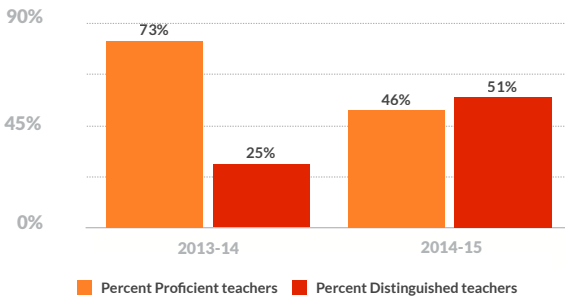


Teaching

The charts in this section show indicators related to instruction: teacher performance levels and teacher survey responses. We looked at changes between 2013-14 and 2014-15.

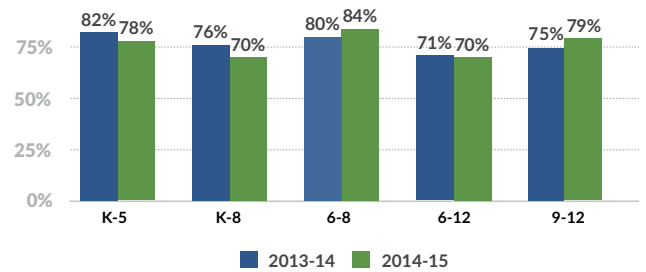
The vast majority (97%) of PPS teachers performed at “Proficient” or “Distinguished” levels over the past year. While this overall percentage remained about the same as in 2013-14, the chart below shows that the percentage of teachers performing at the “Distinguished” level increased from 25% to 51%.

Teaching effectiveness by year



Each year, PPS teachers are asked to complete the district’s Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey. The chart below shows the percentage of teachers in 2014 and 2015 who agreed with the statement, “Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.” Middle schools had the highest levels of agreement, while K-8 and 6-12 schools had the lowest. We also see slight declines in teacher agreement in K-5, K-8, and 6-12 schools, while 6-8 and 9-12 schools had slight increases.

Teacher satisfaction by year

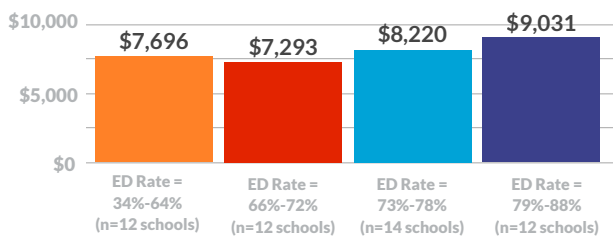


Resources

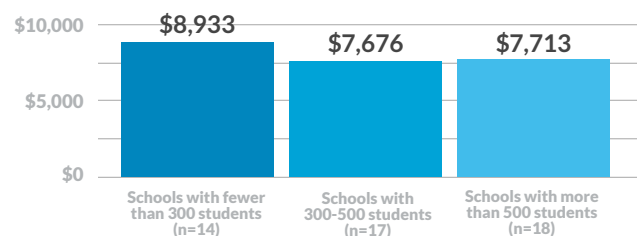
The chart below shows the average amount spent per student from each school’s site-based budget, by percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged (a measure of family poverty; see “Definitions and sources of information” starting on page 114). The chart shows that the largest investments were made at schools falling within the top two

quartiles of poverty (schools with 73% or more of students identified as economically disadvantaged). The next largest investments were made at schools with the lowest percentage 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.

Average site-based per pupil spending by economically disadvantaged



Site-based per pupil spending by school enrollment



School climate

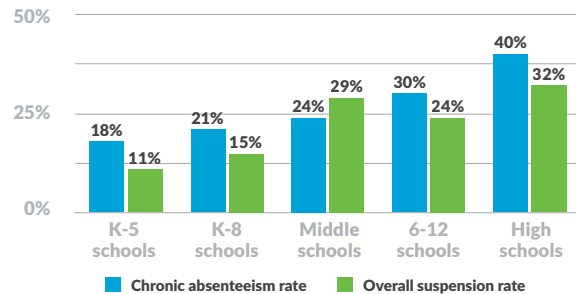
Student attendance and suspensions

The chart to the right shows the percentage of students who were chronically absent (missing 10% of school days or more; see “Definitions and sources of information”) and the percentage of students who were suspended at least once, by school configuration. The chart shows:

- High schools have the highest suspension rates at 32%, with middle schools at 29%.
- High schools have the highest rate of chronic absenteeism, with 40% of students absent more than 10% of school days.

Compared to 2013-14, suspension rates increased between two to three percentage points for K-5, K-8, and middle schools. Similarly, chronic absenteeism has increased slightly in K-5, K-8, and middle schools, and declined slightly in 6-12 schools.

Chronic absenteeism and suspension by school configuration



Academic achievement

PPS achievement on academic milestones

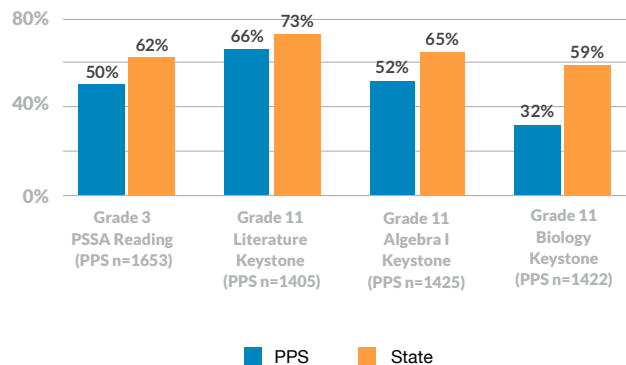
The district’s Whole Child Whole Community Plan articulates three milestones for academic achievement: 3rd grade reading; 8th grade algebra; and proficiency in literature, algebra, and biology as shown on the Keystone exams. (Visit the report Web site for school-by-school Biology Keystone performance: aplusschools.org/2015-report.) The chart to the right shows:

- 50% of PPS 3rd graders are reading at grade level or above, as shown by PSSA (PA System of School Assessment) scores. By comparison, 62% of the state’s 3rd graders achieved grade level performance.
- 66% of PPS 11th graders have scored Proficient or Advanced (passing) on the Literature Keystone Exam (their highest score by the end of 11th grade), a graduation requirement. 73% of the state’s 11th graders have scored Proficient or above on this exam.
- 52% of PPS 11th graders have scored Proficient or Advanced on the Algebra I Keystone Exam, a graduation requirement. 65% of the state’s 11th graders have scored Proficient or Advanced on the Algebra I Keystone. 51% of PPS 8th graders who took the Algebra I Keystone passed with Proficient or Advanced performance (the state does not track this information).

- 32% of PPS 11th graders achieved a passing grade on the Biology Keystone Exam, which is not a graduation requirement. Statewide, 59% 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% (three schools) to 100% (one school). Compared to 2013-14, two more schools offered algebra to 8th graders last year.

Percent Proficient/Advanced on academic milestones by district and state



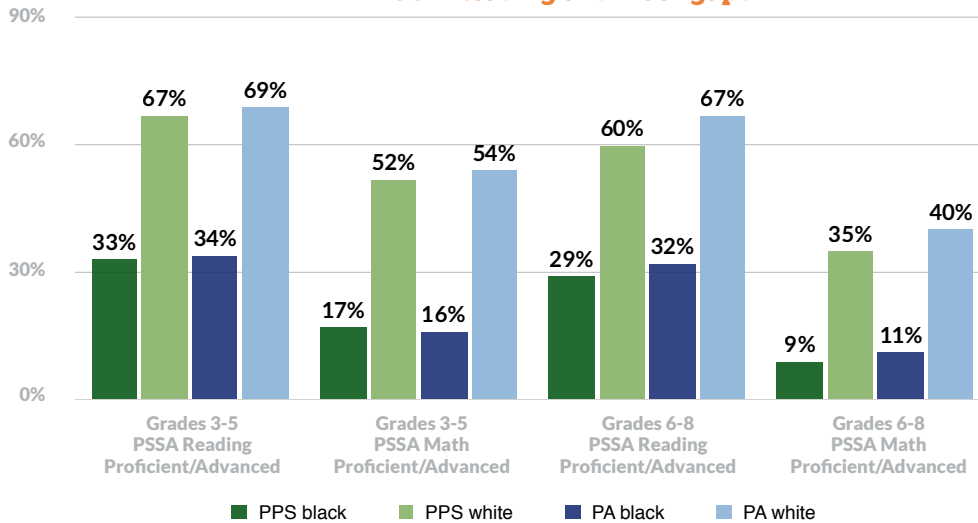
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PSSA and Keystone: PPS students compared to PA students, and the black/white achievement gap

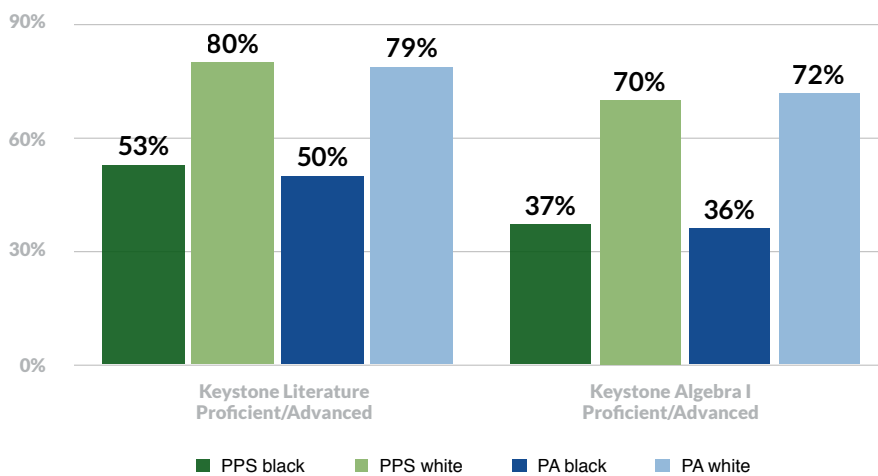
We looked at 2015 achievement on PSSA Reading/Writing and Math tests, and Keystone Literature and Algebra I exams, for all black and white students in PPS and all black and white students in Pennsylvania. We define the PPS/state gap as the difference between black student achievement in the district 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 31 to 36 percent. 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 lower in nearly all cases (ranging from 1-7 points). Because the 2015 PSSAs are considered new tests, we do not compare them to previous years' scores.

PSSA Reading and Math gaps



Keystone Literature and Algebra I gaps



The Keystone gap chart above shows a gap of 26 points for Literature and a gap of 35 points for Algebra I. Black students in the district scored higher than black students in the state on both the Keystone Literature and Algebra

I exams. White students in the district scored higher than white students in the state on the Keystone Literature exam.

Achievement gaps in schools

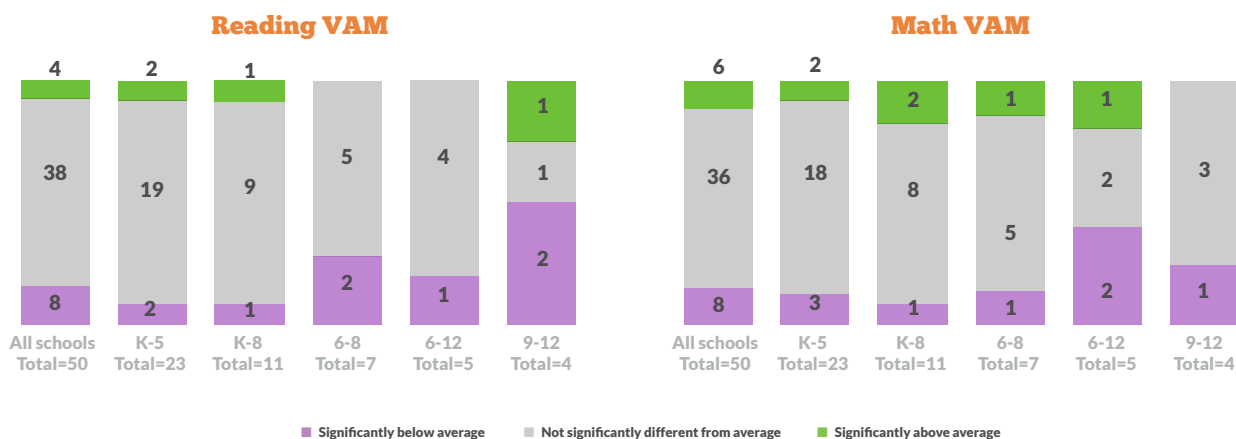
We also looked at the achievement gap within PPS schools and within the city’s charter schools, which we define as the difference between black achievement at the school and white achievement at the district level on PSSA tests and Keystone exams. Five schools had gaps of 10 points or less in Reading/Writing or Literature (including three 6-12 PPS schools and two charter schools). Three schools had gaps of 10 points or less in Math or Algebra I (including one K-5 and two 6-12 PPS schools).

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) do provide this information by measuring the growth of groups of students from one year to the next. VAM, which is calculated by

Mathematica Policy Research, estimates each school’s contribution to student academic growth. The calculation takes into account non-school-based factors that usually influence a student’s rate of growth, such as economic disadvantage. VAM scores for Pittsburgh schools are then compared to those of other schools in the state. (See page 15 for more information about VAM.)

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 Reading and Math assessments in 2013-14 (the most recent year available). The total number of schools that showed contributions to student growth significantly above the state’s average increased from the previous year for both Reading and Math, from two to four and from two to six, respectively. Over time, the district’s schools have shown improvement on student growth compared with the state: between the 2010-11 and 2013-14 reporting years, the number of schools with a score above 50 (the state average) went from 15 to 25.



Post-secondary readiness

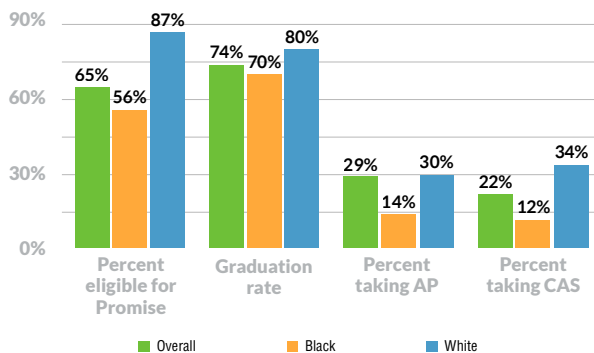
We looked at three indicators to describe post-secondary readiness: graduation rate, percentage of students qualifying for the Pittsburgh Promise by grade point average, and percentage of students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) and Centers for Advanced Study (CAS) courses. For these indicators, we can look back over four years to see the trend.

- In 2013-14 (the most recent year available), the district’s graduation rate was 74%. The rate in 2010-11 was 68%. Therefore, the graduation rate has increased by six percentage points.

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- 65% of the district's seniors overall earned grade point averages that qualified them for the Pittsburgh Promise scholarship (2.5 or higher), seven percentage points higher than in 2012. The increase included both white and black seniors, with qualifying white seniors increasing from 77% to 87% (10 points), and qualifying black seniors increasing from 39% to 56% (17 points). The disparity between black and white students has decreased from 38 points in 2012 to 31 points in 2015.
- Districtwide, 29% of students in grades 9-12 enrolled in one or more Advanced Placement (AP) course. This year, we include 9th and 10th graders in this average for the first time, since AP courses can be offered to students in these grades. 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.

Post-secondary readiness



Closing

Over the past four years, the Pittsburgh Public Schools has seen a slight decline in enrollment at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Poverty rates have increased, leading to the district's participation in a federal universal free lunch program beginning last year.

PPS student achievement on key academic outcomes is slightly lower than the state's, with the exception of the Keystone Literature exam where PPS white and black students outperform white and black students in the state, and the Keystone Algebra I exam where PPS black students outperform black students in the state. Starting this year, PSSAs were based on the more

rigorous PA Common Core standards; therefore, they represent a new baseline for achievement. Over time, district schools have seen improvement on student growth, with 10 more schools scoring above the state's average for growth between 2010-11 and 2013-14.

Graduation rates have increased, as has the percentage of students qualifying for the Pittsburgh Promise by grade point average, which saw a significant increase from the previous three years.

Over time, we have learned more about what it takes to build great schools that advance student learning and success. We have looked closely at how school climate and teaching align with student outcomes. Schools with higher percentages of teachers performing at the Distinguished level, greater teacher stability, and higher teacher satisfaction also have higher levels of student achievement. When these schools serve 9th through 12th graders, more students are eligible for the Promise and enroll in college or trade school the same year they graduate. We also learned that practices affecting school climate make a difference to students: schools reporting higher expectations for students and positive disciplinary practices had lower chronic absence rates and higher achievement and graduation rates (see "School Discipline: Moving beyond zero tolerance to justice" on page 8 for more information).

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 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 and Amy Scott.