



2008 Progress Report to the Community Executive Summary

Introduction:

A+ Schools' vision for Pittsburgh is a community mobilized to improve public education to produce successive generations of young people who thrive and who build their families and futures in Pittsburgh. Since our inception -- and the first version of this progress report -- we have strived to inform the community by compiling and publishing annual reports with achievement data and other key information about Pittsburgh Public Schools. The voices of the community mold the contents of the report. Our response is to present data that is continually accessible and useful to the community, including new and current information.

This year, our report reflects the community's desire for an overall analysis along with school and district data to help interpret the district's progress. We hope this report and the executive summary will help the public understand that progress. We also urge the public to consider the following questions: *To what extent are we achieving Excellence for All as a district and a community? And what can I do, as a member of the community to support student success?*

Methodology:

The information published in the Progress Report was collected through a data sharing agreement with the Pittsburgh Public School District, PPS principals, participating Charter Schools and the Pennsylvania Department of Education. We contracted with a neutral team, including a researcher, writer and designer, to collect, compile and publish the report.

Our staff at A+ Schools reviewed the report data and used statistical methods to determine what, if any, relationships exist. Our analysis consists of percentages of schools that exhibit certain factors and correlations that have been calculated between variables with a significance level of .01. Therefore, in terms of the relationships that are described in this summary, there is only a one percent chance that the trends we observed happened by chance. An important thing to note about correlations is that if two factors are related, that does not mean that either one caused the other. Additionally, a relationship only describes the data we have at this moment and cannot be used to predict relationships between factors in the future. The purpose of the analysis was to look at the district as a whole as each school relates to one another for the 2007-2008 school year, not necessarily how each school has changed over time.

Trends in the Executive Summary are described under the following headings: Achievement on PA State Student Assessment (PSSA) Exams, Growth as Measured by PA Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS), Diversity and Equity, College/ Post Secondary Readiness and Disciplinary Actions within Schools.

Findings for 2007-2008 Progress Report Data:

Achievement on PSSA Exams

The majority of K-5, K-8 and middle schools reported higher scores compared to four years ago. Only two high schools experienced an increase in scores in that time period. Interestingly, factors influencing PSSA achievement varied according to school level:

- In K-5 schools, attendance was most closely related to PSSA math scores.
- In K-8, middle, and high schools race did not have a strong relationship with PSSA scores.
- In high schools, the number of disciplinary actions was most closely related to PSSA scores (however, GPA eligibility for the Pittsburgh Promise was not related).

At all levels, a higher percentage of students scoring in the “Advanced” range directly related to a lower percentage of students scoring in the “Below Basic” range. In other words, the greater the number of students who scored in the “Advanced” range in a school, the more likely it was that other students’ scores were higher.

Growth as Measured by PVAAS

This year’s report includes Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment, or PVAAS, data. Unlike other measures which compare PSSA scores to a standard of proficiency, PVAAS analyzes whether or not selected grade levels in a school have made at least a year’s worth of progress regardless of the starting point. Highlights include:

- The majority of schools with grades four through eight showed at least a year’s worth of growth in reading and/or math.
- Higher percentages of grades four, five and eight showed growth at the Accelerated Learning Academies.
- Higher percentages of sixth and seventh grades showed growth at standard K-8 schools.

Diversity and Equity

The makeup of students in Pittsburgh Public Schools is approximately 60 percent black, 35 percent white and five percent other. Last year, 15 of the 59 schools had student populations that closely mirrored the district’s racial diversity. In order to examine achievement gaps, we analyzed the difference between the percentage of white and black students who scored advanced or proficient on the PSSA in grades five, eight, and eleven.

According to our analysis:

- More than a third of our K-8 schools and high schools and approximately half of all K-5 schools experienced a gap of 40 percent or higher in reading or math.
- Test results from several K-8 and K-5 schools and one high school showed that virtually no black students scored at the advanced level in either reading or math.

College/Post Secondary Readiness

When we examined race and socioeconomic factors and its relationship to college readiness indicators, we found that:

- Schools with a higher percentage of white students also had a higher percentage of students whose GPA met eligibility requirements for a Pittsburgh Promise scholarship.
- Schools with higher populations of low income students had lower percentages of students taking AP classes.
- In contrast, we found no relationship between PSSA scores and graduation rate.

Disciplinary Actions within Schools

We calculated the average number of disciplinary actions per 100 students for each school configuration (K-5, K-8, grades six through 8 and grades nine through 12). According to our analysis:

- Few schools with high enrollment experienced above average disciplinary actions.
- With the exception of middle schools, the majority of schools reported disciplinary actions below the average for their school type.
- Most middle schools reported disciplinary actions that exceeded the average and at a considerably higher rate than the other school levels.
- Most schools expelled six or fewer students, with the majority expelling only one or two. The exception was one high school, which expelled 12 students.

In Closing:

We hope the public finds the *2008 Progress Report to the Community* to be a useful tool in understanding the performance of the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Overall, we can see some significant improvements being made across the district. Many schools are doing well. In some schools, the racial achievement gap is low and students are progressing -- and achieving -- as we know they can. We congratulate students and teachers for their hard work and encourage them to continue their efforts.

However, we see some areas where considerable work is needed in order to continue improving our school system. Some schools are struggling with student behavior. There is still a significant difference in the percentage of black students scoring proficient or advanced compared to the percentage of white students. In our high schools, the higher the enrollment of black students, the fewer number of students with GPAs meeting requirements for a Pittsburgh Promise scholarship. Also, the higher the population of low income students, the fewer the students taking AP courses.

Finally, given the data and the trends we have observed and knowing the work that lies ahead, we urge the Pittsburgh community to join us in considering the following questions:

- *To what extent should we, as the district and community, be focusing on factors such as attendance, disciplinary actions, grades, etc., as a means of improving academic achievement?*
- *Given our observations concerning disciplinary actions in middle schools, what student discipline will be needed in new 6-12 schools?*
- *How do we ensure that all students are “Promise Ready,” or eligible for a Pittsburgh Promise scholarship, by graduation? How do we measure their success and when should we begin monitoring them?*
- *How can we measure the drop out rate in a way that describes what is happening in our district?*
- *As a district, how do we define diversity, how do we determine its value and what are our expectations for diverse schools?*

A+ Schools will host public meetings during the upcoming months to begin the dialogue about the community’s role in supporting the district in addressing these issues. We look forward to your participation. Please see our website for a complete copy of the 2008 Progress Report to the Community, including individual school information.